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EXPERIENCE AND ITS ARTICULATION:

THE QUESTION OF FORM

IN THE POETRY OF ERNST TOLLER

submitted by

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Summary

Ernst Toller (1893-1939) wrote a substantial body of poetry which has received negligible critical attention. This thesis argues that the poetic styles he adopted enabled him not only to examine past experiences but also to evolve strategies for the challenges he faced. His early poetry (1908-1915) shows his attempts to come to terms with love and his enthusiasm to participate in the First World War. The poetry provided him with emotional models which were then revised in the light of experience. The early Expressionist poetry (1915-1919) documents his disillusionment with the war and furnishes insights into his growing political awareness. Toller then adopted the sonnet form (1919-1921), principally in order to express the vicissitudes of prison experience in a controlled manner, and this contributed to his adjustment to incarceration. Das Schwalbenbuch (1922-1924) combines this formal control with a growing sensitivity to the potential of Expressionist verse and delivers insights into his metaphysical thinking. Vormorgen (1924) summarises his experience of war, revolution and imprisonment, in verse of considerable richness and suggestivity, indicating the positive values he intended to apply to his life on release. After its publication, Toller practically ceased to write poetry except for a very few isolated examples, one of which ('Am Fluß', an unpublished poem) points to the possibility of a sixth and masterful poetic phase of which, apart from this one poem, there is no record. This study puts forward explanations for the apparent cessation of his poetry writing after 1924, arguing that his lyrical tendencies nonetheless found expression in his writing in other genres. The thesis provides an index of Toller's entire poetic production and a collection of the unpublished poems and those no longer easily accessible.

Abbreviations

Appendix 2 of this thesis contains poems by Toller which were either unpublished or which appeared in journals which are now not easily accessible to the general reader. [APP]

Toller, Ausgewählte Schriften, Herausgegeben von der Deutschen Akademie der Künste zu Berlin, Berlin, 1961. [AS]

Toller, Gesammelte Werke, ed. by Wolfgang Frühwald and John M. Spalek, Munich, 1978. [GW, with volume number in roman numerals]

Toller, Prosa Briefe Dramen Gedichte, Reinbek, 1979 (originally published in Hamburg, 1961). [PBDG]

Introduction

Even for those who would consider themselves relatively well acquainted with his work, the mention of Ernst Toller does not prompt the epithet poet. Political figure, playwright, essayist, orator - all of these descriptions suggest themselves more readily, as in a sense they should, for it is as a result of these activities that Toller was most widely known amongst contemporaries and has been best remembered. Nonetheless he did write a substantial body of poetry, the collections Die Gedichte der Gefangenen, Das Schwalbenbuch and Vormorgen being the most notable. In addition he published many individual poems in journals at the forefront of Expressionism and Activism both before and during his five years in Bavarian custody. A further twenty-four manuscript poems held in the Deutsches Literaturarchiv in Marbach am Neckar, the Archiv der Akademie der Künste in Berlin and the N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv in Koblenz, amongst which are excellent poems providing fascinating insights into his life, have received no critical evaluation. The period of poetic production was highly condensed, coming effectively to an end with his release from prison in 1924, yet at least until the resounding success of his drama Die Wandlung in 1919 Toller had considered himself as a *Dichter* in the conventional sense of poet rather than man of letters.

Nonetheless posterity has overlooked Toller's poetry, more by default than intent. By the time Kurt Pinthus sought to provide an overview of Expressionist poetry in the anthology Menschheitsdämmerung in 1920, Toller had published just ten Expressionist poems and seven sonnets, six of which appeared later in the Gedichte der Gefangenen. Toller's prison sonnet cycle was not published until 1921, when the vitality of Expressionist verse had begun to ebb, and his mature Expressionist works Das Schwalbenbuch and the collection Vormorgen only appeared in 1924. These works achieved considerable popularity by dint of the quality of the verse, despite being written in a style which had passed the high water mark of its popularity by four, perhaps five years. This time lag is the result of Toller's incarceration and consequent isolation from literary trends.

The neglect of Toller's poetry arises also from his almost complete failure to publish poetry after his release from prison in 1924. His poetic inactivity in the period up to the seizure of power by the Nazis in 1933 can be explained by reference to the overriding political imperatives of the period and by the fact that Toller worked almost exclusively in other more politically effective modes such as journalism. It is unreasonable to expect there to have been any reappraisal of his poetry amongst exiles

in the period 1933-1945, even on the occasion of Toller's death in 1939, when obituaries stressed his activities in resisting Nazism rather than his work as a poet.

This explanation for the non-inclusion of Toller in the canon of Expressionist poetry nonetheless begs the question as to why his poetic work was neglected even after the Second World War. This phenomenon can be accounted for in several ways. Firstly, a great deal of attention has been given in particular to Toller's early plays, which were undoubtedly influential on Expressionist drama in the immediate post-war period and articulated the hopes and disillusionments of his generation. A thesis on Toller's Expressionist dramas published in 1990 lists in its bibliography twenty-five selected critical publications on the theme.¹ In contrast, only two substantial pieces have ever been published on his poetry.² Secondly, at this time Toller came to be viewed as a political dramatist and, once this characterisation had taken hold, little consideration was given to a broader appreciation of his work. Finally, the political dictates of the time, but in part also an acceptance of others' perceptions of him, led Toller to work primarily as a campaigner, journalist and dramatist from 1924 onwards.

His move away from party politics in 1923 when he left the USPD to continue as an independent socialist and political campaigner also contributed to his neglect in the period 1945-1960. The stark polarity of the Cold War left no room for the differentiated appreciation of a non-aligned socialist, and his criticisms both of Soviet communism and of American capitalism in his travelogues Quer durch (1930) had not endeared him to either side. As the intensity of the Cold War began to recede, the reappraisal started in the West by John M. Spalek with his articles and bibliography gained some momentum, but once more Toller's dramatic works formed the focus, following the trend set by contemporaries. In 1968 at the peak of student unrest Tankred Dorst reconsidered the Councils Republic of 1919 in his documentary drama Toller, but very much from the perspective of the engagement of the artist in politics. Even the most recent play on Toller, Albert Ostermaier's Zwischen zwei Feuern

¹ Klaus Bebendorf, Tollers expressionistische Revolution, Marburger germanistische Studien, Bd. 10, Frankfurt am Main, 1990, pp. 270-276.

² These are Martin Reso, 'Gefängnisserlebnis und dichterische Widerspiegelung in der Lyrik Ernst Tollers', Weimarer Beiträge, 7 (1961), pp. 520-556, and Malcolm Pittock's treatment of Toller's life and work which contains a chapter on his poetry, Ernst Toller, Twayne's World Authors Series, No. 509, Boston (USA), 1979, pp. 148-161.

(1993), although written by a poet and incorporating fragments of Toller's poetic work, gives no substantial attention to him as a poet.

If the literary and critical worlds have not seen fit to acknowledge Toller's poetry, then why should it be studied at all? Certainly there were youthful failures, but these are common to all poets, and it is sometimes these which enable us to view the process of writing more clearly, to gauge the influences acting on the writer and to understand the stylistic and formal actions and reactions which were eventually in Toller's case to produce an effective poetic synthesis. The greater part of the poetry is too good to remain neglected, for example the easy harmony of form and theme in Vormorgen, with its lack of authorial intrusion, while the late Expressionist poetry could justifiably claim to be on a par with that of Benn, Trakl or Stramm. Toller's war poetry provides a dimension which that of other, more acclaimed writers lacks: it evinces an attention to concrete detail and a lack of emotional excess, as well as providing a subtle indictment of the inhumanity of war which the reader arrives at independently.

The study of Toller's poetry is also of benefit in understanding his development as a writer in general and in understanding in greater depth themes and ideas which occur in his non-poetic work. Countless reviewers and critics have described his prose and dramatic works as lyrical, without defining the nature of this lyricism. It is beyond the ambit of this thesis to undertake a full study of the interplay between Toller's poetry and his work in other genres, but a picture of some important elements of the lyrical impression which his non-poetic work imparts will emerge from the consideration of his poetry. With the poetry as much as with any other area of his work, we gain insights into his life from his work, just as the works gain significance from the rich nature of Toller's life.

Perhaps the most compelling reason for undertaking a study of Toller's poetry is the absence of a thorough appraisal. Some of the unpublished poetry deserves recognition; the prison poetry has lost no validity in a world where the mistreatment of political prisoners is still widespread; and the war poetry, although not extensive, has been unjustly neglected.

The thesis sets itself two principal aims. Firstly, it will examine the interrelation between experience, the manner in which it was articulated in verse, which we shall term form, and the effect of the medium of expression on Toller's subsequent actions and experience. Poetry in this sense is not just a reaction but also a response to the personal, political and intellectual dilemmas into which he was thrust. The means of expression shaped his interaction with the world, and it is this link between experience and poetic form which is so characteristic of Toller's poetry.

Secondly, it will establish the overall framework of Toller's poetic work, including dates of composition and the adoption of specific literary forms. It is clear that he developed from an early, uncritical, imitative phase through an enthusiastic (if somewhat over-ambitious) espousal of early Expressionism and a brief but intense period of sonnet writing to a balanced synthesis of diction and form in his later works Das Schwalbenbuch and Vormorgen. The ordering of Toller's poetry into clear phases is not merely an exercise in literary-historical categorisation which denies the individuality of the works and seeks to impose a framework on what is actually a seamless progression of verse writing. These categories are implicit in the internal referencing between works and in Toller's conscious adoption of specific styles at different times.

This analysis of Toller's poetic work relies first and foremost on a detailed examination of the texts. This provides a sound basis from which to consider the inspiration for individual poems and their significance for Toller in articulating, and responding to, important issues. The texts are placed in the context of the kind of poetry he was writing at any given stage and in the context of his poetic work as a whole. Each period of poetry writing is delineated against the background of contemporary cultural, social and political movements and events.

What this thesis and its appendices also make clear is the number of substantially different versions of many of his poems. This gives rise to the problem of dating the undated poems as well as those which were attributed with dates by Toller at a later stage, such as the Verse vom Friedhof from Vormorgen. Only one of the three manuscript poems at Marbach is dated; the unpublished poems at Koblenz have been typed and many attributed with dates, but without any certainty that Toller was responsible for this; and the 'Vier Tafeln', two poems from which remained unpublished, are all undated. Even the Verse vom Friedhof, while dated by Toller, could not reasonably have been composed in their final form in the years ascribed to them, as will be established in Chapter 5.

Many methods are used in the thesis to establish the date of a poem. The first source of reference is Toller's autobiographical writings, principally the Briefe aus dem Gefängnis and Eine Jugend in Deutschland. Although Frühwald has questioned aspects of these works, they can nonetheless be considered reliable.³ The next

³

Wolfgang Frühwald, 'Exil als Ausbruchversuch. Ernst Tollers Autobiographie' in Die deutsche Exilliteratur 1933-1945, ed. by Manfred Durzak, Stuttgart, 1983, pp. 489-498. The case for critical acceptance of Toller's autobiographical work is made forcefully in Richard Dove, Revolutionary socialism in the work of Ernst Toller,

historical source is information offered by contemporaries, which is valuable as long as it is treated with discretion. Another way of dating is to look at the poetic, cultural and political climate of the time and, by reference to the poetic style, to seek to establish correlations. Occasionally, though, Toller chooses quite selfconsciously to refer to earlier styles he has subsequently abandoned (as in 'Aufrüttelung') or has modified and mastered ('Abend am Bodensee'). Thus the thematic and textual referencing within the poetry can help to establish the order, if not the precise date, of composition: the relationship between the poetry and Die Wandlung is particularly illuminating in this respect.

This process inevitably compels us however to make assumptions about those periods or events in his life which are not adequately documented. Unavoidable as such speculation undoubtedly is, some basic principles are required in order to lend the process legitimacy. Firstly, where speculation is involved it is clearly described as such. Secondly, does it help to place a poem, does it link apparently unconnected facts or ideas in a meaningful manner, does it provide insights which could not otherwise have been arrived at? Thirdly, the speculation has to be reasonable, that it is to say that it has to have some factual basis or background and be broadly characteristic of what we would expect on the basis of those facts we know. And finally, we must be as certain as we can that there are no reliable sources which gainsay our assumptions on a factual basis. If these conditions are adhered to, speculation where it is necessary is not just legitimate but can be a useful tool in a difficult task.

Over and above the specific aims which this thesis sets itself, it is the first comprehensive appreciation of Toller's poetic oeuvre. This presents both an opportunity and a problem: the former is the chance of bringing to the attention of a wider readership a sadly neglected area of Toller's work; the latter is the awareness of the potential for misconstruction which a fresh area of research brings with it. With this in mind, we shall turn to our consideration of Toller's earliest poetry in the first of the broadly chronological chapters.

Chapter 1

From love to war: the early unpublished poetry (1908-1915)

In the earliest recorded period of his verse writing, Toller used his poetry to formulate the problems inherent in the two main issues faced by young men of his generation, namely love and war. For both of these issues he had no adequate role model to guide him, either in his own family or in the stifling community of Samoczin. Instead he interacted with his poetry, using it as a means, in the absence of personal experience, to establish ideals in his expectations and as a way of formulating the questions which arose. Furthermore, the statement of his expectations in the poetry legitimised his responses to the situations which arose, whether this was coping with rejection by women or generating enthusiasm for the war. Despite Toller's hopes that this would provide certainties, the poetry could not avoid giving its own answers to the questions he posed. His poetry eventually enabled him to achieve formulations of the problems which allowed him to establish his responses to the issues, but this process was much more rapid in affairs of the heart than in war.

The poems to be considered in this chapter represent a distinct phase in Toller's poetry in that they all conform to styles, or accept ideas, without any suggestion of conscious critical reflection. This applies both to the manner of Toller's writing - that is to say, the given poetic form he is trying to achieve - and to the events which formed the stimuli for these poems. The first main theme is perhaps unsurprisingly love, but in particular we gain insights into Toller's attempts to reconcile stylised romantic conceptions of love with the reality and physicality of sexual relations. Although he probes many aspects of this duality, it cannot be said by the end of this period that he comes to a clear, critical understanding of the experiences he has undergone.

The other main theme is war, but again, as in the initial love poems, an idealised conception of war, which was able to survive only as long as it had not been challenged by direct experience. The theme of war provides the best and worst examples of his work. The two hymns to battle treated in this chapter cover the period up to about March 1915, when Toller volunteered for frontline duty. From this point onwards, Toller not only begins to question his commitment to the war, he also begins to write poetry which meets, if not masters, the form to which it aspires: in 'Marschlied', published in 1918, he even comments ironically on the kind of poem which he had previously so naïvely written.

Among the manuscript poems we have from this period are those in the estate of the sculptor Fritz Claus, comprising six poems now held by the Deutsches

Literaturarchiv in Marbach am Neckar. A letter in the file from Eugen Roth, the executor of Fritz Claus, states that there were many more poems in the collection, but that some were so poor that they were burned.¹ As there is no information available on Toller's relationship to Fritz Claus, or on which poems he may have given him, it is impossible to establish whether among the works burned there were poems which were not later published. Of the six still extant, only two - 'Der Ringende' and 'Aufrüttelung' - were subsequently published, and these will be examined in detail in the next chapter. In the estate we have one dated poem, 'Nacht im Priesterwald' (21 April 1917). This poem will not, however, be considered as belonging among the early poetry. The topos of the poem - a night in the trenches - makes it logical for it to be considered among those war poems written after direct experience of the front.

Another source of unpublished and manuscript poems is the N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv in Koblenz.² It is not known exactly how these poems came to be in the archive, but their presence suggests that the Nazis may well have been interested in collecting any material on Toller which they could use in their propaganda. There are in total nineteen poems here: some of them are handwritten, others typed; some are dated, others not. Again one section of the poems, dealing with Toller's disillusionment after the war, will be dealt with in the next chapter. The other poems belong to clearly different phases in Toller's poetic development, and they complement usefully both our scant knowledge of Toller's life and passages from texts such as Die Wandlung and Eine Jugend in Deutschland.

For details of his first forays into poetry we are reliant on Toller's own reminiscences. In Eine Jugend in Deutschland he recounts how he recited his first poems to the family cook. [GW IV 29] Present in these poems were a fascination with death and the transience of existence, and a strong relationship with nature, motifs which were to be prominent in his mature poetry such as the Gedichte der Gefangenen and Vormorgen. In a sketch written for a French journal in 1929 he described his childhood poetry as an attempt to express his feelings of delight in nature:

¹ A copy of Eugen Roth's letter is kept by the Deutsches Literaturarchiv in Marbach am Neckar.

² I am indebted here to my supervisor Stephen Lamb for making available to me the material he found in this archive.

Toller aussi a écrit des poésies semblables lorsqu'il était un petit garçon. Quand il voyait un arbre en fleurs, un oiseau qui chantait et lui faisait plaisir, il s'asseyait à sa table et écrivait des vers.³

To this affinity with nature was added in due course a fascination with the potential of language: 'Das Schreiben gefällt mir, es ist schön, Worte zu reihen, ich feile die Phrasen, ich wechsele Verben und Adjektive [...], ich bastle stundenlang an holprigen Sätzen.' [GW IV 29] He is not speaking here specifically of poetry, but a flexible approach to the use of language was to be a prominent feature of his Expressionist poetry, and is already in evidence in the poetry considered in this chapter.

These poems will now be examined in three separate groups: firstly, the early manuscript love poems from the Deutsches Literaturarchiv; secondly, some early love poems from the N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv; and finally three poems illustrating the enthusiasm with which Toller embraced the war in 1914 and in early 1915.

1.1 Early love poems from Marbach

The poems in Marbach and Koblenz clearly do not form two discrete collections, for there are frequent correlations of style, expression and theme. Nonetheless it is helpful to examine them in two separate groups because the interrelations between the poems in each group provide important insights into their evolution and significance.

The two poems considered in this section are 'Umarmung' and 'Wunder'. [APP] The manuscripts in Marbach are undated, and there is no concrete evidence which enables us to identify their dates of composition. It will be demonstrated, though, that these were among the earliest poems which Toller wrote, and in support of this three main strands of argumentation will be followed. Firstly, the poems will be placed in the context of lyric poetry of the early part of this century before the rise of Expressionism. Secondly, it will be argued that one of the poems is commented on by another in the same collection of manuscripts, and that therefore one of the poems must predate the other. And finally, attention shall be drawn to elements of composition to make the case that these are early 'finger exercises', part of a budding poet's learning curve.

These poems contain elements of three literary styles of the early twentieth century, Impressionism, *Neuromantik* and literary *Jugendstil*, which formed part of a reaction to Naturalism and were part of the texture of literature in general, and of

³ Toller, 'Une leçon de littérature sur moi-même', *Revue d'Allemagne*, No. 17, March 1929, pp. 217-222, here p. 220.

poetry in particular, in Toller's youth. These styles ceded to the new movement of Expressionism, and Toller's poetry followed this stylistic direction.

Gero von Wilpert describes literary Impressionism as:

[...] die getreue Wiedergabe subjektiv-sinnlicher Eindrücke, genau beobachteter Stimmungsgehalte, besonders der zufälligen und vorübergehenden Augenblicksbewegung und einmaliger Seelenzustände in allen ihren feinsten Differenzierungen und Nuancen, Halbtönen und Schattierungen.⁴

If we take this as an adequate working definition of this literary tendency, then we can see elements of it in both 'Umarmung' and 'Wunder'. Both are poems which describe a mood, and are therefore short on concrete description. 'Umarmung' is a description less of the act of love than of Toller's personal impressions and state of mind. The use of similes is a characteristic of poetry written as part of the reaction to Naturalism, and extensive use is made of them here to communicate sensual impressions.

In their rejection of Naturalism, many writers and poets looked back to the age of Romanticism and revived many of its precepts in the movement known as *Neuromantik*. In 'Umarmung' we can perceive elements more closely associated with Romanticism, and their presence in the poem is probably a result of Toller's exposure to *Neuromantik*. The most striking element is that of synaesthesia, the combination of different sense perceptions in one impression, for example 'Dein Atem wob Gewölbe aus Strahlenbändern'. The use of synaesthesia and the emphasis on light and colour would seem to suggest the influence of Max Dauthendey, and especially perhaps of his prose/poetry volume *Ultra Violett* published in 1893, the year of Toller's birth. Another Romantic trait is the linking of the scene in 'Umarmung' to the natural surroundings in which it takes place, suggesting in its fusion of the subject's mood with nature a kind of pathetic fallacy.

There is also a possible biographical link between Toller and *Neuromantik*. The publisher Eugen Diederichs, who was known for his support of *Jugendstil*, considered himself at the same time a supporter of *Neuromantik*.⁵ Diederichs invited Toller to attend a meeting of Germany's leading progressive intellectual lights at the Burg Lauenstein in Thuringia in September 1917. It may be that Toller became known to Diederichs through his participation in the literary seminar of Artur

⁴ Gero von Wilpert, *Sachwörterbuch der Literatur*, Kröners Taschenbuchausgabe Bd. 231, 4th edition, Stuttgart, 1964, p. 296.

⁵ 'Ich empfand mich selbst als neuromantischen Verlag.' Eugen Diederichs, *Aus meinem Leben*, Jena, 1927, p. 25.

Kutscher at the University of Munich, but it is also quite possible that Toller came to the attention of Diederichs by sending him samples of his poetry. He was not shy in presenting his poetry to others: before his participation in the First World War, he read his *Anfängergedichte* to the father of Walter Mehring;⁶ and as a student at Munich, he read some of his poetry to Thomas Mann. [GW IV 75] If Diederichs had felt that Toller's poetry had caught the mood of the times, it may have been for this reason that he invited him to participate at Lauenstein.

While at this meeting, Toller met the poet Richard Dehmel, and it is through the latter's poetry that we can connect 'Umarmung' to the movement of literary *Jugendstil*. [GW IV 79-80] As Johannes Schindler remarks, Dehmel was 'Vorbild, Anreger und Erwecker für eine ganze Generation junger Menschen und Dichter'.⁷ Toller was no doubt drawn to Dehmel because of the similarity of their experiences: although thirty years older, Dehmel too had enthusiastically volunteered for service at the outbreak of the war, and Toller dedicated the poem 'Frühling 1915' to him; Dehmel too subsequently became disaffected and then campaigned for an end to the war. But Toller may well have been drawn to him because he had functioned for the young man as a literary model. Volker Klotz, in an essay on the lyric poetry of the *Jugendstil*, notes especially of Dehmel 'die Bilder des Sprießens, Knospens und Keimens, [...] also des organischen Werdens'.⁸ There are clear traces of these characteristics in 'Umarmung': 'Wie Sommerhauch, der Rosenknospen weckt', 'Wir fühlten Lebensfülle fruchtgeschwellt sich mehren', 'Hing stolzer Orgelklang in Blütenzweigen'. The only other personality present at Lauenstein whom Toller mentions at any length is Max Weber, the sociologist, to whom he later read some of his poetry and who, like Dehmel, seems to have made a significant impact on him.⁹

⁶ 'Der letzte Besucher, den mein Vater in seiner Bibliothek empfing, war der Student und Kriegsfreiwillige Ernst Toller, der ihm ein paar schüchterne Anfängergedichte vorlegte - unterwegs zu den Schützengräben des Ersten Weltkrieges.' Walter Mehring, *Die verlorene Bibliothek*, Icking/Munich, 1964, p. 18.

⁷ Afterword of Paul Johannes Schindler to *Richard Dehmel, Dichtungen, Briefe, Dokumente*, Hamburg, 1963, p. 288.

⁸ Volker Klotz, 'Jugendstil in der Lyrik', *Akzente*, 4 (1957), pp. 26-34 (here p. 33).

⁹ Toller says of the conference: 'So bleibt nur eines: das Geschenk menschlicher Beziehung, bleibt Richard Dehmel, bleibt Max Weber' [GW IV 79]. In her life of Max Weber, Marianne Weber mentions how, after Lauenstein, Toller

The poem also takes up some of the dominant motifs of lyric poetry of the *Jugendstil*. Of the seven mentioned by Jost Hermand in his collection, this poem shares the 'Frühlingsgefühle' and the 'Blütenzauber', and it also shares some of the facets of the 'künstliches Paradies'.¹⁰

'Wunder' is such a short poem that it gives us very little material and few pointers with which to fix it in a contemporary setting. However, one characteristic which would seem to indicate the influence of *Jugendstil* would be the use of *Gebärde*. With reference to Ernst Stadler, Klotz describes it thus:

Die Betonung der Gebärde äußert sich vornehmlich in der Entaktivierung der Tätigkeitswörter. Das geschieht einmal in der reichen Verwendung modalen Adverbien.¹¹

In the second line of the poem, 'zuckend weichen' fits this description, but it is not possible to say with certainty that this then represents an explicit link with *Jugendstil*.

It is not to be supposed from this analysis that Toller was consciously writing in a particular style in these poems, but we have other evidence for the assumption that he used literary models in his early poetry. On 25 January 1918 Toller gave a reading from his works at Munich University, among them some poems of his own composition and *Nachdichtungen* based on works by Morgenstern, Däubler and Werfel.¹²

By reference to Toller's biography and to the influences at work, we can set an approximate period for the composition of 'Umarmung' and probably of 'Wunder' too. The poems presuppose a certain emotional maturity, and thus they are unlikely

would come to them of a Sunday and read from his poems:

Als Nachwirkung der Lauensteiner Tage beteiligten sich im Winter 1917-18 einige sozialistische und pazifistische Studenten an Webers Sonntagen. Sie waren durch das Kriegserlebnis bis in die Wurzeln erschüttert. Ernst Toller war darunter. Er wurde zutraulich und brachte eigne Gedichte, die er vorlas. Die Zuhörer wurden bewegt von dem Hauch einer reinen Seele, die an die ursprüngliche Güte und Solidarität der Menschen glaubt und glaubt, daß es möglich sei, die auf Befehl ihrer Regierungen einander mordenden Völker zum Fortwerfen der Waffen zu bringen.

Marianne Weber, Max Weber. Ein Lebensbild, Heidelberg, 1950, pp. 647-648.

¹⁰ Lyrik des Jugendstils, ed. by Jost Hermand, Stuttgart, 1964.

¹¹ Klotz, op. cit., p. 30.

¹² Wolfgang Frühwald and John M. Spalek, Der Fall Toller, Munich/Vienna, 1979, p. 13.

to have been written before say 1910, as at this time Toller was 16/17, this then forming the earliest date. Given that the power of the influences examined here began to wane with the rise of Expressionism and that Toller rapidly joined in this movement, the latest date of composition could not reasonably exceed 1915. The probable date of composition of 'Umarmung' (and probably of 'Wunder', too) might well lie therefore in the period 1910-1915.

The poem 'Aufrüttelung' [GW II 9], which prefaces Toller's first drama Die Wandlung, seems to refer explicitly to 'Umarmung'. If this is the case, then 'Umarmung' must certainly predate 'Aufrüttelung'. The case turns on the following lines from what is postulated as the earlier poem:

Dein Auge strahlte auf als Gotendom.
Dein Atem wob Gewölb aus Strahlenbändern

These lines are strikingly similar to the following lines from 'Aufrüttelung':

Aus Sonnenstrahlen formte Glaube Kathedralen,
Von hochgewölbten Toren fielen Rosenspenden.

Description, tenor and vocabulary of the lines are very similar, but the functions which they perform in their respective poems are quite different. The lines from 'Umarmung' are intended absolutely seriously, and are representative of the tenor and expression of the whole poem. The lines in 'Aufrüttelung' - they are part of two similar stanzas - are undermined by the rest of the poem, as the elaborate, ornate *Jugendstil* stanzas cede to stark Expressionist poetry. The latter poem can be viewed as amongst other things an attempt by Toller to express changes which have occurred in his life. He explicitly rejects Impressionist, *neuromantisch* and *Jugendstil* modes of expression in favour of Expressionism, and thus he implicitly criticises his own erstwhile acceptance of these conventions and of the assumptions of a world which had not yet experienced the undreamt-of terrors of trench warfare.

This implies that 'Umarmung' was written before the movement of Expressionism had gained momentum, although 'Lichtbündel' might suggest some awareness of the style. It also suggests that it was written before Toller's experience of war at the front because, in order to express those experiences, he turned to Expressionist techniques. This would narrow the period of probable composition of the poem down to 1910-1914.

Compared to Toller's poetic production after 1915, both of these are in their formal aspects very strictly and regularly constructed. Neither poem is particularly successful, primarily because Toller's strict adherence to formal aspects stifles the creativity of the poems. They give the impression, in fact, of poetic finger exercises, with the practice of specific aspects of the craft of poetry writing in mind. For

example, Toller normally uses iambic metre for his more formally constructed poetry. Yet, unusually, in 'Wunder' he abandons his accustomed use of iambs for that of trochees, as though he were experimenting with different metrical schemes. The iambic metre in 'Umarmung' is tightly held, but Toller imposes no regularity on the number of feet in any given line. Toller seems to have concentrated on infusing this poem with as much typical *Jugendstil* imagery and vocabulary as possible, and this would then account for the rather overpowering intensity of its language and imagery. If these poems were formal experiments, this would suggest that Toller was still a relative novice, and that these samples do in fact come from an early period of his creative life.

We have considered arguments to support the contention that 'Umarmung' and 'Wunder' are among the earliest poems written by Toller, and there is no evidence to suggest that these poems come from a later period. The poems probably have no great significance either for Toller's later work or for the poetry of the time, but they do help to establish and to clarify two important points. Firstly, they help to correct the tacit assumption that Toller's writing career began with Die Wandlung in 1919. While that drama was his first major publication, it was also the culmination of a considerable amount of writing which was a precondition of the ability to write a major drama. And secondly, 'Umarmung' and the documentary evidence that the youthful Toller was a prolific writer help to establish that he passed through a creative phase before Expressionism. Just as Expressionism did not spring from nowhere, so Toller's adoption of it was not the start of his career as a creative writer, and the internal referencing in 'Aufrüttelung' discussed above demonstrates this. Georg Heym, too, developed through *Jugendstil* to Expressionism and, as with Toller, these two phases are connected.

1.2 Early love poems from Koblenz

The five poems considered in this section are all concerned with the poet's relationship with women. There are no political or ideological elements in the poems: their preoccupations are entirely personal. This would place them at a time in Toller's life when he was old enough to have relationships with women, but before he had become involved in the war or in politics, thus they probably stem from his adolescence in Bromberg and his student days in Grenoble just before the war.

Our knowledge of Toller's personal life is scant, based on the few details available in Eine Jugend in Deutschland and comments made by contemporaries. In his partial autobiography Toller tells of an unsuccessful relationship with an actress

in Bromberg while he was a *Realgymnasiast*, ending in a libel suit issued by the actress' fiancé. Toller then relates observations on both French and German women he encountered during his student days at Grenoble University.

There are indications as to the dates of two of the poems. The manuscript of 'Liebe' in the archive at Koblenz is dated as 1909. 'Resignation', it will be demonstrated, deals with Toller's reactions to the end of the affair with the actress Maria Groß. It will be argued through stylistic, thematic and biographical correlations that a credible chronological context for these poems can be established. The first three poems, 'Liebe', 'Ständchen' and 'Resignation' were probably written more or less contemporaneously with the experiences they describe, while 'Die Häßliche' and 'Ich suche Dich' show Toller coming to terms with the bitterness of the experience and looking forward with hope to the possibility of a more successful relationship in the future.

If the date 1909 attributed to the manuscript of 'Liebe' [APP] in Koblenz is correct, then Toller would have been about sixteen years old at the time of its writing, an age, perhaps, when the idealised notion of love combines in a curious chemistry with the sexual curiosity of the inexperienced. These aspects of love, amongst others, are considered in the poem. The predominance of *neuromantisch* lexis and imagery, alongside those of literary *Jugendstil*, speak in favour of the dating.

The poem is related from the point of view of love itself, and describes the range of effects it can have, specifically on women. The first third of the poem deals with the lighter aspects of laughter and of the song in the heart which love inspires; then, inevitably, come the pain and the misery complementary to love. The sorrows are described as an acid which dissolves the thin film of light and beauty, and which releases in its turn a poisonous gas. Hard on the heels of the negative side of love comes a storm of sexual desire culminating in the elevation of the relationship to a new and higher plane. The apparent emotional and physical contradictions have been resolved in the act of love itself. The poem comes full circle with the repetition of the first couplet.

It is not possible from the documentary evidence - the lack of which bedevils the study of Toller's work - to be certain whether he had been exposed to the entire gamut of love's experiences before he wrote this poem. The lack of concrete detail and a certain coyness in the more proselytising passages of the poem would seem to indicate otherwise.

Additional reasons for imputing to Toller at this stage a lack of carnal experience are supplied by the next poem, 'Ständchen'. [APP] From the title, one might feel justified in expecting a traditional serenade which extols the beauty and

virtues of the loved one, and certainly for a short while one can imagine the poem to be thus. Toller clearly does not yet possess the object of his desires, and part of the function of a serenade is after all to woo the loved one. As it unfolds, though, it becomes clear that the poem is about Toller's reactions rather than the qualities of the woman. Initially the poem appears to relate the assault which the woman makes on his senses. The first three lines deal with sight, and the next three couplets with smell, touch and hearing successively. Sight rounds off both ends of the poem: it begins with the woman's 'Augen voll Verheissung' and ends with the 'schielen' of the uncertain adolescent admirer. Synaesthesia figures too, as her perfume strokes his senses and her limbs sing to him. The questions relating to each sense, as to whether it alone is responsible for his physical infatuation, are clearly rhetorical: it is the totality of the sensual onslaught which intoxicates him.

As the poem progresses, it becomes clear that Toller is working out his response to a rather unequivocal invitation from the woman's 'Augen voll Verheissung'. Women are still clearly a mystery to him at this stage when he refers to the charms 'aller rätselhaften Frauen'. Her look is unambiguous; his response is 'schielen', a lack of confidence or an unwillingness to look directly at the object of his desires, for fear of being required physically to substantiate his implied response.

Eine Jugend in Deutschland provides us with the biographical frame of reference. In his final year at the *Realgymnasium* in Bromberg, Toller watched the actress Maria Groß in a production of Jedermann at the Stadttheater. After a period of lovesick mooning outside her window, he describes how he got to know her well enough to be admitted to her room. He tells how she gave him all the necessary invitation to intimacy, but through lack of confidence compounded by an idealised view of her he failed to take advantage of the situation. This poem could well have been written in the aftermath of this experience: Toller reviles himself for his lack of courage and seeks in the final line to conjure up the spirit he needs - in a sense, he is taking poetic Dutch courage.

As with many of his early poems, Toller indulges in the lexis and imagery of myth and legend, 'Märchenhafter Gärten [...] mystisch kultendunkle Schlangen [...] Teufel'. In many poems this is rather general, an attempt merely to create an ominous and portentous mood. Here, the references to the temptation in the Garden from the Book of Genesis are quite specific. As with some psycho-sexual interpretations of Genesis - and even that of Milton in Paradise Lost - the parable can be seen to work on both a mythic and a sexual level. It is the odour of Maria's 'Märchenhafter Garten' which excites the poet's senses, giving rise to wishes symbolised by snakes, certainly an image Freud would have recognised. The

temptation she represents brings about in him an intoxication or drunkenness, as some versions of the Genesis story describe the effects of the eating of the apple. In a sense it is an suggestion to him to leave his innocence behind. There is some doubt, though, whether the snake is his own creation, or whether it is some imposition from outside: 'Oder will ein Teufel mit mir Possen spielen'. The final strategy in the poem is to scorn the schoolboy for his 'melancholisch hyperchondrisch' voyeurism, in an attempt to drive him into the bold act which the situation requires.

The title 'Resignation' announces to us that the attempt was either unsuccessful or too late. [APP] Although, unlike 'Ständchen', a sonnet, there are sufficient stylistic similarities to place it at around the same time. For example, the use of synaesthesia in 'im duftopalenen Tau', or vocabulary such as 'junger Frühlingsmorgen [...] sich entfaltete [...] auf daß ich strömend ihn erfülle'. The poem looks at all aspects of the relationship, but puts the blame for its failure clearly on his lack of willingness to take the initiative. It is a romanticisation of the prosaic truth to which Toller admits in Eine Jugend in Deutschland: 'Ich langweile Maria. Wenn ich in ihre Pension komme, sagt mir die Wirtin, Maria lerne und wünsche nicht gestört zu werden'. [GW IV 38] Just as this deflates the treatment given to the relationship in the poem, so Toller's assertion in the final stanza that Maria was probably crying through the nights is somewhat unlikely.

The first stanza introduces the confusion in the youthful Toller between the idealistic and the sensual. In the play he watched, Maria was dressed in a simple robe of virginal white and thus, playing on her name, he identifies her with the mother of Christ. It is interesting to see how he continues the religious imagery from 'Ständchen'. This elevates Maria to quasi-divine status adding, as Toller explains in his autobiography, to the confusion which inhibits him from reciprocating her advances:

Ich möchte sie küssen, aber sie ist eine Heilige, Heilige darf man nicht küssen,
wenn ich sie jetzt küsse, wird sie denken, ich nütze sie auch aus [...] [GW IV 37]

But behind the apparently virginal façade lies a 'Venus hell in Sinneslust geborgen', waiting for him to fulfil her. He flees from this and subsequently reviles himself for his lack of courage, as we have seen in 'Ständchen'. He describes himself as 'nichts als Hülle': the idea of the mask with nothing behind it was to be a recurrent one in Toller's early Expressionist poems such as 'Menschen' and in the early dramas Die Wandlung and Masse Mensch.

In the final stanza he has generated the courage to respond to her, but finds it has come too late. Her initial 'Frühlingsmorgen', to which he replies with

'Sommerglut', has been replaced by 'ein herbstlich schwerer Schatten', turning her to the 'toten Dingen' reminiscent of winter in the final strophe. Her lassitude now contrasts with his new-found vigour. The term *müde* is often used by Toller when describing someone's lack of response to his bouts of intense enthusiasm, one of the manifestations described by Dove as part of a manic depressive personality.¹³ The idea of tiredness or ennui is then expanded upon in 'Die Häßliche'.

The would-be affair with Maria Groß ended ignominiously for Toller in a libel suit issued by the actress' fiancé. Toller writes about few of his relationships with women, so the inclusion of this episode in his autobiography implies that it must have had a considerable effect on him as a young man. This, along with a yearning for sophistication unsatisfied by provincial Bromberg and a desire to flee his stifling family life, led him to Grenoble University for a spell as a student. As a reaction no doubt to his experiences before leaving Bromberg, Toller initially eschews the fleshpots of Grenoble, preferring instead the solid *Tugendhaftigkeit* of the German student leagues, where the only female temptation came in the form of apparently straight-laced teachers refreshing their knowledge of French.

It is in this context that we shall consider 'Die Häßliche', a poem which is difficult to place in Toller's career, both in terms of dating and of content. [APP] For modern, enlightened perceptions its tone may appear misogynistic, but we have no evidence to suspect this of Toller at this or any later stage. It may be a genuine attempt to extend his *Einfühlungsvermögen* by trying to place himself in the position of a woman who has failed to find fulfilment in love. Even if this is the case, the end product is crass and derogatory towards women, even given that it was an early poetic attempt.

The biographical context however would go some way towards explaining the poem's genesis, if it were to be seen as part of Toller's reaction to the failure of his affair with Maria Groß. When he sees the advertisements in Bromberg for Grenoble University, he thinks to himself: 'Fort aus Deutschland, in Frankreich werde ich studieren und Maria verachten'. [GW IV 38] The mention of 'Couplets' and 'Variete', while terms current in German, would not be inconsistent with the writing of this poem in France. 'Variete' itself is of course a reference to the theatre, but of a more lowly form than acting, in tune with the lack of status Toller accords to 'Die

¹³ 'Perhaps the most significant, and certainly the most disturbing flaw in Toller's character was his temperamental instability. He was subject to abrupt changes of mood, in which burning enthusiasm would suddenly give way to deepest melancholy.' Richard Dove, He was a German: a biography of Ernst Toller, London, 1990, p. 6.

Häßliche'. A possible link also exists with 'Resignation', where Toller takes up on and elaborates the theme of *Müdigkeit*. If Toller had been inclined, in his embitterment, to write a spiteful description of the woman who had spurned him, this would be one way of doing it. And the last strophe, with its very definite description of the woman's room, might in fact be close to a description of Maria's *Pension* room, which could have contained red 'Plüschmöbeln' and 'Oeldrucke'. While not excluding other possibilities, these aspects of the poem are certainly consistent with its having been written during Toller's student days in Grenoble.

The poem consists of four fairly even strophes. The first relates her disgust at her physical state, the second her wretchedness at the state of her own soul, the next her resolution not to have a child and the final strophe deals with how she sees her own future. Toller may be making an oblique reference to himself in the first strophe, when the woman compares herself to a poet who has written 'Flammende Verse' debasing himself in a cabaret act. Toller read his own poems to Maria Groß, and the poet is here of course the opposite, within the context of the image, of the woman. The *neuromantisch* diction of the second strophe ('sie strahlte ein geschliffener Diamant [...] in tausend Strahlen bräche [...] Glorioten winde') is consistent with the suggested dating of the poem.

The third strophe reveals that the woman has failed even in going on to the streets like a prostitute in order to attract a man and have a child. As is the case in other poems, Toller often defines women in terms of their function and in terms of the role of men. A woman's first priority is to fulfil herself through the true love of a man; if this fails, she can at least try to bear children; if she cannot attract a man even by demeaning herself, Toller seems to be saying, then she has a right to feel she is utterly worthless. The most offensive implication here is that the lives of women gain meaning only through successful interaction with men. In his later works, Toller was never to make himself guilty of such crassness, but elements of this view of women - albeit couched in more positive terms - recur in his work, for example in the prison sonnet 'Schwangeres Mädchen auf dem Gefängnishof'. [GW II 316-317]

Considerable emphasis is placed in the last two stanzas on variations on the word *müde*. Toller attaches his own significance to the idea: for him it is having nothing to contribute, being unable to respond to enthusiasm and inspiration, lacking passion, in short ennui. We have seen it used to describe the reaction in Maria's eyes

in 'Resignation' to Toller's revelation of himself as 'Hülle'.¹⁴ The idea of ennui also forms a link between 'Die Häßliche' and the final poem in this section, untitled but with the first and recurrent line 'Ich suche Dich'. [APP] They contain passages which are strikingly similar. Firstly, from 'Ich suche Dich', Toller is describing the hopes he had for the experience of being with older women:

Ich ging zu liebessatten reifen Frauen.
Ich hoffte ihr Inneres zu schauen.
Und sah eine Krüste von Lüge und Schein
und spielerisches Müdesein.

Toller is hoping for more than just sexual love from older women: he is looking for wisdom and depth behind their apparent maturity and world-weariness. We can now compare this with a passage from 'Die Häßliche':

Doch wenn ich mich in den Augen des Mannes sah,
Den ich liebte,
Dann schaute ich meine Seele an
Wie eine fahle trübe Dämmerstunde

This would appear to be the same experience related from two different perspectives. In the first poem, the man sees through the woman's superficiality; in the second, the woman recognises her superficiality by reading the reaction in the man's eyes.

Given the apparent link between the two poems, we can assume that 'Die Häßliche' predates 'Ich suche Dich'. The former is an intense, even bitter poem, the latter a more optimistic and balanced account of Toller's renewed hope and resolve in matters of the heart. The intoxication of physical love is 'Verflogen' but 'Liebe', that is to say spiritual love, is 'Zerflattert', it has slipped out of his grasp. Toller's quest to capture it takes the form of an odyssey through compliant young ladies, mature but superficial women and eventually to prostitutes, 'der Seele Sarg', the nadir in his hopes for a more elevated form of love. This may refer to his visits to brothels recounted in Eine Jugend in Deutschland, where he also describes his confusion at the lack of constancy of the girlfriend of an Austrian officer and at the double standards of the prim German women teachers who preached chastity to other students and then cavorted in *deshabille* in the brothels in the evenings.

The poem relies for effect on contradictions. In his description of his search for love, Toller relates the arousal and dampening of expectations. The final section contains pairings of apparently irreconcilable ideas: chaining something which is

¹⁴ These two ideas are combined again in 'Menschen' (1/2): 'Die Menschen taten von sich ihre Hüllen / Und sahn sich scheu voll Mißtraun an, / Ihr Haß ward müd, verschlackt'. Kameraden der Menschheit, ed. by Ludwig Rubiner, Potsdam, 1919, pp. 62-63.

‘Zerflatter’; fighting and vanquishing the loved one, but also bowing in humility before her. The final line reinforces Toller’s now optimistic resolve: ‘Ich such Dich’.

These five poems chart a little-known phase in Toller’s adolescence, but beyond any intrinsic biographical interest they also show that his poetry had a concrete function within this period. ‘Liebe’ and ‘Ständchen’ were part of his attempt to generate the courage to take full advantage of the opportunities being offered him, while ‘Resignation’ shows him trying to find a face-saving explanation for his lack of courage. ‘Die Häßliche’ plumbs the depths of his bitterness, but it is a tribute to the irrepressibility of Toller’s character that in ‘Ich suche Dich’ he should seek a poetic formulation which would help him to return to affairs of the heart with greater wisdom - and success.

1.3 ‘Zum Siegen oder Sterben’: three poems by the war enthusiast

Toller addresses the question of war in verse at four main junctures in his life, and each time he approaches this theme we gain insights into his personal development, his understanding of society and his evolution as a poet. War is therefore a perfect example when considering, through his poetic development, Toller’s understanding of the world, his ability to articulate that understanding and to formulate it in such a way as to state ideas which strike a chord not just with his immediate contemporaries but also with later generations.

The initial enthusiast phase produced poetry which is derivative and unoriginal, and in this sense the poetic form mirrored the manner in which Toller not merely allowed himself to be carried into the war but in fact willed it on himself in an effort to subdue misgivings and to feel unconditionally a part of German society.¹⁵ The next group of poems, to be examined in Chapter 2, indicate the doubts which he was no longer able to suppress, but equally was unable to articulate effectively. The use of an image-ridden, vague, declamatory and ponderous early Expressionist style not only helped to obscure the message - in as far as there is a clear message at all - but actually this process of inadvertent obfuscation in a sense became the message: German youth was shattered, outraged and confused.

The sonnet phase which follows coincided with and gave expression to Toller’s desire to come to terms with and to assimilate the experiences he had undergone. The

¹⁵ In the Vormorgen poem ‘Alp’ [AS 56, PBDG 279] Toller comments on the willing enlistment of war recruits by comparing them implicitly with lambs following each other to slaughter: ‘Es blökt den Takt das Schaf bäh bäh’.

war receives no mention whatsoever in the Gedichte der Gefangenen, but bursts forth in the Verse vom Friedhof in the collection Vormorgen, the earlier poems now in highly edited and revised versions along with many newly-published poems. The truncated, terse but vivid diction of late Expressionism finally gave voice to all of Toller's feelings about his war experiences, this time though in a form which was not purely personal but also appealed to the reader directly. The war can thus be seen as the theme which demonstrates most clearly the separate stages of Toller's poetic development.

Given the importance of this theme in his poetry, it would be useful to relate briefly Toller's involvement in the First World War. His account of his participation in the war is to be found in his partial autobiography Eine Jugend in Deutschland, published in 1933. He recounts how *Kriegsenthusiasmus* had been instilled into pupils at the Bromberg Realgymnasium:

Wir Jungen wünschen den Krieg herbei, der Friede ist eine faule und der Krieg eine große Zeit, sagen die Professoren, wir sehnen uns nach Abenteuern, vielleicht werden uns die letzten Schuljahre erlassen, und wir sind morgen in Uniform, das wird ein Leben. [GW IV 36]

Inevitably the constant inculcation of such values created a predisposition towards uncritical acceptance of the war as a matter of overriding national priority. His initial reaction to the outbreak of the war is similar to that of many German literary figures, some of whom had been extremely critical of Wilhelmine Germany but who forgot their differences in what was portrayed by the monarchy and the government as the hour of national need. Many poets - among them Richard Dehmel and Julius Bab - wrote paeans to German participation in the war.¹⁶ This was as a result of the atmosphere of national unity carefully contrived with the offices of the Kaiser, which Toller experienced on his journey back to Germany from France in August 1914:

An den Bahnhöfen schenkt man uns Karten mit dem Bild des Kaisers und der Unterschrift: 'Ich kenne keine Parteien mehr'. Der Kaiser kennt keine Parteien mehr, hier steht es schwarz auf weiß, das Land keine Rassen mehr, alle sprechen eine Sprache, alle verteidigen eine Mutter, Deutschland. [GW IV 50]

At this stage, Toller was unable to perceive that this was a false transcendence of irreconcilable political antagonisms. Germany had become an industrial and military world power without developing naturally the political apparatus necessary to smooth some of the social and political contradictions of its industrialisation, and the

¹⁶ For this reason, the poem 'Frühling 1915' would appear to be dedicated to Richard Dehmel.

atmosphere of unity which Germany's ruling classes sought to create could never have been more than a diversion from these realities.

Many of those who had initially embraced the war enthusiastically became its opponents. This is not the case with Toller, however: only in military prison in 1918, when he consolidated his socialist inclinations by reading socialist writers, did Toller come to view the First World War as a political swindle. His rejection of war was at first a gut reaction of physical revulsion which undermined the ideals he had thought he was fighting for, not a critical *Auseinandersetzung* with what he later perceived as the capitalist basis of war. Toller had enlisted almost as though it were a *Glaubenskrieg*, and the assurances that this was a defensive war were taken uncritically. With the hindsight which 1933 was able to lend, Toller reflected:

Ja, wir leben in einem Rausch des Gefühls. Die Worte Deutschland, Vaterland, Krieg haben magische Kraft, wenn wir sie aussprechen, verflüchtigen sie sich nicht, sie schweben in der Luft, kreisen um sich selbst, entzündeten sich und uns. [GW IV 53]

Unwilling to wait for his call, Toller volunteered for the front in March 1915, and was transferred to an artillery battalion near Metz. After a while, however, the lack of direct hand-to-hand action led him to force his own transfer to the infantry.

It was in an infantry division in the Bois-le-Prêtre that Toller underwent an experience which was to make the war totally unacceptable to him. While digging in a trench with a pick-axe, he uncovered the entrails of an unidentifiable dead soldier. The fact that it could have been anybody was an enormous psychological shock for the young war enthusiast:

Ein toter Mensch.

Nicht: ein toter Franzose.

Nicht: ein toter Deutsche.

Ein toter Mensch.

Alle diese Toten sind Menschen, alle diese Toten haben geatmet wie ich, alle diese Toten hatten einen Vater, eine Mutter, Frauen, die sie liebten, ein Stück Land, in dem sie wurzelten, Gesichter, die von ihren Freuden und von ihren Leiden sagten, Augen, die das Licht sahen und den Himmel. In dieser Stunde weiß ich, daß ich blind war, weil ich mich geblendet hatte, in dieser Stunde weiß ich endlich, daß alle diese Toten, Franzosen und Deutschen, Brüder waren, und daß ich ihr Bruder bin. [GW IV 70]

Toller accepts here that his initial enthusiasm for the war, based largely on his desire to feel assimilated into German society, was based on self-deception. It is at this stage that he began to perceive that the call for national unity, while seeming to offer the prospect of belonging without divisions, had in fact had the net effect of making deeper the divisions in the most fundamental collective, the brotherhood of man. This particular experience started Toller's disillusionment with the war, which was to

accelerate into physical and mental collapse in May 1916, leading to his being pronounced unfit for further service.

Even at the time of Toller's first foray into organised protest activity in the *Kulturpolitischer Bund der Jugend in Deutschland*, his opposition to the war was moral and intellectual rather than political. The very name of this group, formed by Toller on 24 November 1917, suggests more than mere practical politics, and this is substantiated by its manifesto, Leitsätze für einen kulturpolitischen Bund der Jugend in Deutschland. The principal aim of the *Bund* is described thus:

Der Bund will dahin wirken, daß der Dinghaftigkeit, die heute in der Politik und Wirtschaft eine beherrschende Rolle spielt, ihr sekundärer Platz zugewiesen wird, damit an ihre Stelle Menschhaftigkeit tritt. [GW I 31]

Indebted to Marxist theory, traditional left-wing protest politics relied to a great extent on a material analysis. The *Bund* on the other hand, with Toller as its prime mover, sought to replace this with the ethical value of *Menschhaftigkeit*. In her account of the formation of the *Bund* Margarete Turnowsky-Pinner, a fellow-student at Heidelberg, tells of another student who participated 'even though as a trained Marxist he had misgivings about the appeal, its pathos and many of its ideas'. Toller, she claims, was motivated primarily by his revulsion at 'cruelty and injustice' and by his experience of the war.¹⁷ The points made specifically in the manifesto bear this out: all are enunciations of aims rather than practical programmes for political change. The last of the nine points is devoted entirely to the arts and contains the most detail of all.

Only in military prison in 1918 did Toller begin to see clearly the political and social implications of the war and the inadequacies of German society of the time. The shift in emphasis is demonstrated clearly in Eine Jugend in Deutschland: the sixth chapter, 'Auflehnung', portrays the events which led up to the suppression of the *Bund*, whilst the seventh chapter, 'Streik', begins immediately with an account of the sea-change in Toller's political thinking.

A process of reappraisal may be observed in Toller's war poetry, of which there are three distinct kinds. One embodies a misguided *Kriegsenthusiasmus*; this is followed by a declamatory attempt to generate high moral outrage without the critical analysis necessary to make it effective; and finally, the effective deployment of mature late Expressionism in what is, by any standards, successful war poetry. In subsequent

¹⁷ Margarete Turnowsky-Pinner, 'A student's friendship with Ernst Toller', Leo Baeck Institute Yearbook, 1970, No. 15, pp. 211-222, here pp. 217-219.

chapters the second two categories will be examined, while here the war enthusiast poetry will be considered.

Three unpublished poems from the N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv provide us with an insight into Toller's state of mind in the latter half of 1914 and at the start of 1915. Two of them are full-bloodedly nationalistic and fulsome in their *Vaterlandsliebe*, but the derivative nature and poor writing of the poems would hardly have made them candidates for publication even during the most heady martial and patriotic euphoria. Although their content could have been highly embarrassing to Toller later in his career, it is to his credit that he makes no secret of his enthusiasm for the war at this stage in any of his writings, and particularly not in Eine Jugend in Deutschland.

Of these poems, 'Lumpenlied' is likely to have been the first written, possibly around the time of his enlistment. [APP] To accept the pencilled date 1908 attributed to the manuscript of this poem in the N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv would be to presuppose that Toller was capable of writing this poem at the age of fifteen. It would also involve accepting that the themes treated were of relevance to him while he was still some four years short of finishing his career at the Bromberg Realgymnasium. If one compares this poem with others written at around that age, such as 'Umarmung' and 'Wunder', it is practically impossible to find any stylistic correlations. Furthermore, it is hard to believe that in his provincial Bromberg life Toller could have been exposed this early to the influences of Expressionism, of which we find some suggestion in the image of death and in examples of unusual syntax.

If we accept that 1908 is unrealistically early, then we are left with the task of establishing a likely time. The sentiments contained in the poem would seem consistent with Toller's feelings on enlistment in the German army in August 1914, which he describes for us in the chapter 'Kriegsfreiwilliger' in Eine Jugend in Deutschland. The tone in the poem is one of outrageous self-aggrandisement: one can imagine the young Toller, having joined the army in the midst of the patriotic *Rauschgefühl*, considering himself a devil-may-care brigand, a kind of German Foreign Legionnaire. Indeed, in view of Toller's wish to escape into the army and away from his personal problems, and given his feelings of estrangement from his society, the comparison is not inappropriate. This bravado would have been much harder to generate after experience of the trenches, and no poetry which we know to have been written after this experience contains this attitude. 'Haut man uns den Hintern voll' suggests clearly that Toller does not realise exactly what that could mean in practical, physical terms. The latest that this poem could probably have been

written would therefore have been around Spring 1915, shortly before Toller volunteered for frontline duty.

In addition to the biographical and thematic arguments for a dating of August 1914 to Spring 1915, there is also a stylistic case. As with 'Frühling 1915', which will be considered presently, the poem has a dimension of the drinking or marching song, and this would support the contention of approximately contemporaneous composition. Both poems are derivative rather than manipulative of their intended style, unlike the later 'Marschlied' which puts its own form to ironic effect. This implies that 'Lumpenlied' stems from a relatively early stage in Toller's poetic development.

The poem commences with mention of the writer's *Zerrissenheit*, a concept with a long pedigree in German literature, back to Faust's 'Zwei Seelen wohnen, ach! in meiner Brust' and beyond. With Toller, however, this has a very specific sense which is best illustrated by reference to the initial scenes of *Die Wandlung*, where the protagonist Friedrich is torn between his inherited affiliation to the Jewish minority and his avid desire to assimilate into the German community. At Christmas time he stares longingly out of the window at the Christian celebrations taking place opposite. [GW II 17] His desire to establish his commitment to German society drives him to enlist for the colonial wars, just as Toller saw the First World War as his chance to prove his German credentials. Hence 'mein Körper bell fiebernd Blut': it is by spilling the blood of the enemy that Toller is to be accepted fully into German society, or so he thinks. And this acceptance is the 'Heimat' in the refrain; further consideration will be given to this concept in the examination of the poems related to *Die Wandlung* in the next chapter.

When Toller refers to himself in the refrain as 'Narr', we can safely assume that he does not intend us seriously to believe this. The view is attributed to the drunken 'Tölpel', fully assimilated Germans who would regard as foolish the urge of a provincial Jewish student to fight for a country which would never do more than tolerate him, if that. Ultimately, though, the poem leaves us with the impression that Toller is indulging a certain sense of superiority, a kind of inverted snobbery. The German hoi-polloi, he appears to be saying, could not be expected to understand the fundamental drives which compel a German Jew born in a predominantly Polish community to seek assimilation into a society inherently antagonistic not just to Jews, but to intellectuals in general. In a sense, this is a celebration of an otherness which the well-adjusted could not be expected to comprehend, and which in fact would lose its particularity if it were generally understood, thus depriving him of a kudos at once both undesired and treasured.

Death is treated with scorn in this poem, as it might well be by a young man enthused by war hysteria without any notion of battle other than the jingoistic rantings of his schoolteachers and the mythic glorifications of Nietzsche, selections of whose work appeared in a volume provided with every German soldier's knapsack. The 'Dreckspatz' we find here becomes the genuinely disturbing 'Fratze' in the poem 'Sylvester 1916', written after time spent in the trenches, and which will be considered in the next chapter.

The skeleton image of the death figure with its 'sieben Klapperrippen' puts one in mind of the *Totentanz* in the *Vorspiel* of *Die Wandlung*, in which the skeletons of war casualties rise in ghoulish manner from the battlefield. While the implication here is that the brave young recruit is laughing in the face of a death he has not yet faced, the scene in *Die Wandlung* points to more fundamental statements both about war in general and what Toller saw as the exploitatively capitalist essence of the First World War. He often incubates ideas and images, bringing them to full fruition later in his work, and it is interesting to see the different perspectives an author puts on his images at different stages in his development. As will also be seen in Chapter 2, Toller amended his view of the relationship between French farmers and occupying troops between writing the poem 'Sämann - Soldat' in 1915 and committing his autobiography *Eine Jugend in Deutschland* to print in 1933.

Two other themes find mention in the poem which will recur in the other two war enthusiast poems. The 'Bruderschaft' at the start of the second strophe is the unity amidst diversity of class, region and origin to which Toller exhorts his comrades both in 'Steht eine Wacht in Frankreich' and in 'Frühling 1915'. And the 'Knecht und Vassallen' in the next line suggest his naïve awareness of the socially disenfranchised, which expresses itself at this stage in the vague desire for a classless society. Only when he became involved in the munitions workers' strikes early in 1918 did Toller begin to incorporate a socially critical and ideological perspective into his sense of social justice.

'Steht eine Wacht in Frankreich' also comes from the earliest phase of Toller's participation in the war. [APP] In his autobiography he describes in detail the atmosphere of patriotic fervour amongst German nationals returning to their home soil upon the outbreak of hostilities in August 1914. As the exiles arrive in Switzerland, they burst out into a spontaneous rendition of 'Deutschland über alles', embracing each other in joy. [GW IV 50] This passage emphasises the absence of any critical thinking as the euphoric conscripts-to-be, assured now of the Kaiser's impartiality ('Ich kenne keine Parteien mehr'), intoxicate themselves with the concepts and keywords of unconditional patriotism. After acceptance into the army and a short

period of initial training, Toller was posted to a reserve infantry batallion near Metz. On the way, the young recruits passed over the Rhine singing 'Die Wacht am Rhein' (of which this poem is an anaemic derivative) and rattling their sabres. The version of events in Eine Jugend in Deutschland is recounted in the tone of amused critical irony which the vantage point of 1933 could afford him; the poem indulges no such detachment and takes itself very seriously indeed.

The theme of the poem is the unifying effect of the war on the German people, as exemplified by the particular 'Wacht in Frankreich' which Toller is about to join. A hymn to war can only benefit from a clear *Feindbild*, and what could serve the purpose better here than the perfidious French lurking beyond that most German of rivers? As a result, all the old causes for division within the German people no longer apply: they have left behind hatred, greed and the desire for recognition. It is a modest people, shunning the 'Fanfarenklang', consumed in its love for itself and desirous of 'Arbeit und Pflicht, so Tag um Tag'. From its depths this people bursts spontaneously into 'brausender Tiefgesang', as did Toller and his comrades as they passed over the Rhine. The 'beschworener Händeschlag' probably occurred at about this point - Toller recounts the scene in Eine Jugend in Deutschland: 'Die Kadetten ziehen die Säbel aus der Scheide, > Achtung! < schreit einer, ein anderer singt > Die Wacht am Rhein <, wir singen mit und schwingen drohend unsere Gewehre'. [GW IV 53]

The 'Volk' referred to is the German racial community to which Toller at this stage desperately wanted to belong. Although German-ness provides the common identity, the actual process of unity is achieved only through the emergence of a potentially threatening external enemy. The love we find here is therefore not *Nächstenliebe* but rather the need for self-preservation within the collective. And even within this relatively uncomplicated eulogy there is still the suggestion that national unity has been bought at the price of the deferral of satisfaction for the nation's constituent groups. This people 'will sein Recht nicht mehr', but only as long as the threat of the enemy without obscures the contradictions of German society. This people wants not temporary makeshifts but rather inalienable rights, which must one day be fulfilled. It is debatable whether Toller has any clearer idea at this stage of exactly what these rights consisted of than when he wrote poems with a 'rebellischen Ton' in his early Bromberg schooldays, such as 'Auf, erwacht!' quoted in Eine Jugend in Deutschland. [GW IV 29] The most likely conception was that of an idealised classless society, inherently liberal towards its Jewish members, like that suggested in 'Aus den Erläuterungen des Bundesrats zum Gesetz über den

Vaterländischen Hilfsdienst', which was written not long after this poem and is considered in the next chapter.

The reality of this enforced unity was to turn out very different indeed. Toller was distrusted by Bavarian soldiers as a 'Saupreiß' and victimised by a lieutenant who, like him, had been studying at university before the outbreak of the war. The resolution of these and other social, political and regional differences in a display of national cohesion could only ever be temporary and apparent. Toller was too perceptive to be able to deny this truth to himself for very long, thus his conscious attempt to arouse in himself even greater enthusiasm for the war was designed to distract him from uncomfortable insights.

The process of the overcoming of contradictions through enthusiastic and uncritical application to a new idea is a prominent facet of Toller's approach to his life at least until his lengthy imprisonment and possibly beyond.¹⁸ What is true here of the war is also true of Toller's participation in the ethical socialist faction of the Munich Councils Republic. These enthusiasms give way eventually to doubt and to (sometimes partial) rejection, a process which is examined in Toller's poetic and above all in his dramatic works. The war poetry considers and reconsiders the experience of war over a period of nearly ten years; in Die Wandlung we see not only hope in the Messianic figure of Friedrich but also suggestions regarding limitations in his analysis; Masse Mensch considers the ethics of revolutionary activity and the conflict between means and ends, as does Die Maschinenstürmer; and Hinkemann examines the limits of what socialism is able to achieve for the individual.

We find another eulogy to the glories of war in 'Frühling 1915'. [APP] The poem describes Toller's anticipation of going to the front, and will in due course form a point of comparison with the much shorter 'Sylvester 1916', which describes Toller's feelings at the prospect of returning to battle after direct experience of it.

The biographical background to the current poem is clear from Eine Jugend in Deutschland. Until March 1915 Toller had been stationed with a reserve infantry regiment near Strasbourg, and had become completely stultified by the combination of inactivity and senseless drill. In addition, he had been victimised by a young, petty

¹⁸ While Toller's campaign for aid in the Spanish Civil War was undoubtedly motivated directly by humanitarian reasons, it is also true that his commitment to this cause provided direction for him at a time when he had reached what he considered to be a watershed in his career as a writer. Further details of his work in this campaign can be found in Richard Dove and Stephen Lamb, 'Traum und Wirklichkeit: Ernst Tollers spanische Hilfsaktion', Exil, Jahrgang 1990, No. 1, pp. 5-26.

lieutenant, and this had compounded the tedium and purposelessness of his time in the reserve battalion. In a bid to escape this and to gain a real taste of the war, Toller volunteered for frontline duty and was transferred to an artillery regiment near Pont à Mousson.

In the poem Toller reveals that he is, true to form, looking for a new adventure which would relieve - even, he feels, perhaps solve - the 'Sorgen' which had been plaguing him. And there were quite a few: the victimisation and the tedium of life in the reserve battalion; his uneasiness as to the extent to which he, as a Jew, had really been assimilated into the German army; the bitterness and rancour surrounding his amorous experiences in France; and the unresolved question of his relationship with his family, and in particular with his mother. Instead of coming to terms with these problems, he aims to escape 'Zum Siegen oder Sterben'. Fortunately for his sake it was to be neither - Germany lost the war, and Toller survived with a considerably more realistic conception of battle.

The 'R.D.' of the dedication is in all likelihood Richard Dehmel who, though into his fifties, enlisted immediately for frontline duty in the war and wrote a considerable number of poems in praise of the German war effort. In fact the poem is not merely dedicated to him, it is offered to him 'in Verehrung'. A prominent theme in Dehmel's poetry is the unity which war achieves amongst such a wide variety of people of German background, and this is echoed in 'Steht eine Wacht in Frankreich':

Von Norden und Süden nach Ost und West
auf ährenbekränzten Wagen,
die heiße Faust um die Waffe gepreßt,
sahn wir's zum Schlachtfeld jagen.
Aus Preußen und Bayern, von Donau und Rhein,
aus Schleswig und Elsaß, Tirol, Böhmen, Krain,
nur Deutscher wollte da jeder sein [...]¹⁹

Just as Toller in due course became perturbed by the war, Dehmel underwent similar doubts. It is no surprise, therefore, that Toller was to seek his company at Diederichs' summit for intellectuals at Burg Lauenstein in 1917. Dehmel lapsed eventually into disillusionment and bewilderment, portrayed in poems such as 'Weltkriegsmoral' which, while giving full rein to his doubts and revulsion, nonetheless ends up exhorting the participants in the war to continue:

Kann die Menschenwelt noch mehr verwildern?

¹⁹ 'Alldeutschlands Erweckung' from Richard Dehmel, Schöne wilde Welt. Gedichte und Sprüche, Berlin, 1920, pp. 109-111.

Massenmord ward Sittlichste der Sitten;
heldisch wird ums Niemandsländ gestritten,
das nach Aas und Kot stinkt, nicht zu schildern. [...]
Mensch, drum laß uns willig weiter ringen, [...] ²⁰

Unlike Dehmel, Toller proceeded actively to oppose the war through his participation in the organisation of the Munich munitions workers' strikes. His own physical and moral revulsion was to find effective expression in the collection Verse vom Friedhof, which contains none of Dehmel's moral ambivalence towards the war.

The emphasis in the poem is very much on youth: having cited his own intentions, Toller enjoins German youth to participate in the glorious war. We should not assume that Toller was particularly impressionable from the tone of this poem. Firstly, he had gained by this stage no direct battle experience, but secondly, what notion he held had been inculcated into him constantly as a pupil in the Bromberg Realgymnasium. No death is as heroic as that in battle, he was told, and this belief is incorporated in the boy in the second stanza. The phrase 'mit lockigem Haar' puts one in mind of the Christ child in the carol 'Stille Nacht', 'holder Knabe mit lockigem Haar'. One would not wish to stretch a careless image too far, but there is a trace here of the Christian notion of the redemption of others through the death of an individual.

The poem in fact creates an *Aufbruchstimmung* through the mixture of a number of ideas. Spring is depicted here not as the gentle restorer of life but as the harbinger of violent death, bringing us closer to the gory regeneration of the Nietzschean Superman than to Goethe's gentle 'stirb und werde'. 'Der junge Frühling' is the time of opportunity for German youth, as the old order breaks down. This view is not restricted to patriotic war poetry, because it also underpins much early Expressionist (and by extension mostly leftward-leaning) poetry. The 'Bub' therefore also represents in a more general sense bold German youth embracing its future, and its logical development is the idealised naked boy diving into the water in Toller's sonnet 'Abend am Welssee', symbolising at this later stage in Toller's ideological development the purity of German revolutionary youth. [APP]

In these three examples, Toller has used poetry to formulate an ideal of war and of the social integration which his participation could bring. As Minden comments, this was hardly unusual for artists at this time:

Apart from the apocalyptic fever provided by the outbreak of war, certain other deep-felt needs of that generation of artists were apparently met: notably

²⁰ Dehmel, 'Weltkriegsmoral', *ibid.*, p. 137.

the prospect of a sense of community to overcome the artist's isolation, and the sense also of political identity within the surpassing cause of war.²¹

Yet such exaggerated and uncritical sentiments are in themselves suspect because they suggest that Toller was forcing his feelings at the cost of denying certain growing doubts. The writing of the poems was part of a process designed to generate the enthusiasm necessary to bear him through the experience of war but, as will be seen in the next chapter, his misgivings broke through even when trying to maintain this optimistic attitude.

²¹ Michael Minden, 'Expressionism and the First World War', in The violent muse. Violence and the artistic imagination in Europe, 1910-1939, ed. by J. Howlett and R. Mengham, Manchester, 1994, pp. 45-55, here p. 46.

Chapter 2

The early Expressionist (1915-1919)

In this chapter a diverse group of poetic works is assembled under the heading of early Expressionism. Toller's Expressionist period could be described as lasting from 1915 to 1924, with the exception of the period 1919 to 1921 when he concentrated largely on writing and publishing in the sonnet form. While it could be argued that isolated elements characteristic of Expressionism appeared in his poetry before 1915, it is nonetheless true that such elements multiply as he moved to writing free form rhythmic poetry and ceased to be reliant on established models. It is also the case that the early poetry is uncritical to any appreciable degree of the society in which it was written. To this extent it cannot be regarded as Expressionist poetry, because it lacked the crucial element of reaction against established society: for example, one could easily see the most reactionary armchair warrior approving of the sentiments expressed in 'Frühling 1915'. The end of the Expressionist period of his poetry is much simpler to define: he practically ceases to publish poetry, as far as can be ascertained, after compiling the collection Vormorgen and writing Das Schwalbenbuch, and the reasons for this cessation will be explored in the final chapter.

Why should this period of his writing be described as Expressionist? Toller was highly conscious of the writing taking place around him, as has been seen from the derivative nature of his early poetry, and on at least one occasion he is known to have read publicly his own *Nachdichtungen*.¹ Enough textual correlations with writers of the time can be found to establish the fact that Toller was well aware of what and how his contemporaries were writing.

It is therefore reasonable to expect elements in his work which accord with the generally accepted characteristics of Expressionist poetry. The most immediately striking aspect is the abandonment of the strict forms of some his early poetry in a move towards free form. There is nothing exclusively Expressionist in the adoption of free form, but a recurring element of Toller's free form is its rhythmic nature and its frequent use of alliteration, particularly with regard to consonants. When it comes to theme and content, his early and late Expressionist

¹ On 25th January 1918 Toller held 'einen Vortragsabend eigener Werke' in the Steinicke-Saal at Munich University. It is here that he read *Nachdichtungen* of works by Morgenstern, Werfel and Däubler. Frühwald and Spalek, Der Fall Toller, op. cit., p. 13.

phases are characterised by their *Menschlichkeit*, the universality of brotherhood irrespective of nationality, religion or class, and in this sense 'Aus den Erläuterungen des Bundesrats' and 'Sämann-Soldat' mark the beginning of his Expressionist verse. While concerned with the *Mensch* in general and his position in a world whose preconceptions had been devastated by the First World War, nonetheless the images and preoccupations of the poetry are subjective. Toller shows considerable faith in the representative nature of his experience, enough to use it as the subject matter to address and move his contemporaries. Recurrent too is the accusatory tone of the poetry, the disillusionment and anger with the self-interested deceptions which set the world community against itself. Frequently there are references to the stripping away of falsehoods: fondly imagined idylls hiding the horrific and exploitative truth of society and war, freely assumed masks falling away to reveal emptiness and coldness. All these elements place Toller firmly in the mainstream of Expressionism in his poetry, just as his early dramas have always been accepted as seminal works of Expressionist theatre. This is supported by the number of self-declared Expressionist periodicals in which he published poetry, such as Die Aktion and Die weißen Blätter.²

The division of Toller's own Expressionist poetry into early and late periods is a relatively simple task. There is no need here to address the question of what in general constitutes early and late Expressionist poetry. After a flurry of publications in 1919, Toller only published two more poems over the next two years which were not included in the sonnet cycle Die Gedichte der Gefangenen (1921).³ He then published only one new poem before the appearance of Das Schwalbenbuch and the collection Vormorgen in 1924. This was 'Widmung', which prefaced the second edition of the Gedichte der Gefangenen and in an amended form the Lieder der Gefangenen, the revised collection of prison poems in Vormorgen.

This establishes a clear chronological divide, but the differences go far beyond mere composition dates. In terms of style, the earlier poems are in general much longer and more verbose, leading to a diffusion of the desired pathos. They tend to have the character of monologues, seeking to arouse, sometimes almost to

² 'An die Sprache' and 'Marschlied' were published in Die Aktion, 8 (1918), pp. 297 and 172 respectively. 'Entlassene Sträflinge' appeared in Die weißen Blätter, 6 (1919), pp. 262-263.

³ 'Soldaten' was published in 1920 and 'Leichen im Priesterwald' in 1921 (see Appendix 1).

harangue the reader. Their concerns are pacifism, awareness of the suffering of others and the need for personal and social regeneration. The imagery is mythic and quasi-religious, often to the point of mystic ecstasy. Overall its appeal, as its source, is emotional.

The later Expressionist poetry is much less cluttered. It limits its targets in order to achieve greater focus and intensity; its pathos mostly stops short of self-indulgence. While concerned with questions of violence and *Menschlichkeit*, it is seldom *aufrufend*; at times it is almost defeatist, as would befit poetry written after the First World War and the failed revolutions which followed. Often earlier poems appear in much-pruned form. If the style of the earlier poems was redolent of Franz Werfel and the early Johannes R. Becher, the later poems accord far more with Georg Trakl and August Stramm. The Futurist Filippo Tommaso Marinetti exerted considerable influence through his theories on the simplification of poetic diction, and a particular adherent of these ideas, August Stramm, had a pronounced effect on Toller's war poetry, as will be seen in Chapter 5. In general Toller applies to his later poems the principle of *Ratio* propounded by the leading Activist Kurt Hiller, with whom he corresponded while in prison.

Toller's adoption of Expressionism was a response to the urgency and overwhelming complexity of the issues he faced in accepting that his enthusiastic espousal of the war had been utterly wrong. This declamatory, provocative and pathetic style also helped to shape his vision of society and his ideas for its regeneration. This chapter demonstrates how he was unable to deny his doubts, how he accepted their validity and embarked on his political career. As his pacifism turned to political and social *engagement*, it will be seen how his Expressionist lyrical response to the political challenges he faced helped shape the role he adopted in the Munich Councils Republic.

2.1 Doubt and disillusionment with the war

The direct experience of battle represents a watershed in Toller's biography, in his *Weltanschauung* and in the only genre in which up to this point he had written extensively, his poetry. As the youthful idealism of enlistment gave way to battle experience and, as a result of the Battle of the Marne in September 1914, to the prospect of protracted trench warfare, Toller's poetry documents a process of reluctant doubt turning to outright disillusionment. He was by no means the only young writer to undergo this process: the young Brecht's 'Fähnrich' in the poem of the same name goes into battle, despite his fear and the carnage all around him,

with 'Augen wie Opferflammen'.⁴ And as the young Toller became more acquainted with the Expressionist poetry of his contemporaries, so this seemed the most appropriate mode in which to articulate the fundamental feelings welling up inside him, which at least initially he tried to suppress in demonstrations of renewed fervour.

The poem 'Aus den Erläuterungen des Bundesrats zum Gesetz über den Vaterländischen Hilfsdienst' [APP] is Toller's reaction to the Upper House's confirmation of the Kaiser's dictum on the outbreak of war, 'Ich kenne keine Parteien mehr'. [GW IV 50] There is still an element of the keen anticipation of battle found in 'Frühling 1915' in the exhortation 'gebt euer Letztes freudig hin', but this idealisation of the experience of war suggests that Toller had not yet participated at the front to any substantial degree, and thus the date of composition is likely to be after spring or summer 1915.

As in the war enthusiast poems, the notion of national duty is to overcome the issues which once divided the German people, 'was uns zweifelnd einst gebunden'. Toller makes it explicit here that the creation of national unity does not in itself solve or alleviate these divisions, but that it is merely the precondition for a different kind of society. To this extent, war is not an end in itself but only the precursor of a new social order.

The poem communicates the feeling that something irrevocable has happened, for the flames that have been fanned are 'nie erlöschend'. The expectations aroused by the war are unable in future to be denied, and the incentive of equality offered by the Kaiser and the Bundesrat is balanced by the threat of rebellion, the nature of which is left imprecise at this stage. For the war has given expression to the social 'Ohnmachtszorn' which has been building up, and which is to be released and re-channeled in defence of the fatherland. However, like the genie released from the bottle, it is a force which cannot subsequently be trammled, and when the war is resolved it will train itself with full vigour on the question of social justice and the class-ridden society. Hence the central insertion of 'Gedenkt des Worts: Tut eure Pflicht!', in order to ensure that this elemental force is directed to the immediate imperative of victory in the war and to prevent premature social upheaval. The conflict between the notion of duty and the reality

⁴ Bertolt Brecht, 'Der Fähnrich', Werke (große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe), Bd. 13, Berlin/Weimar and Frankfurt am Main, 1993, pp. 80-81.

of trench warfare is made even clearer in the first version of 'Leichen im Priesterwald', which will be discussed later in this chapter.

The desire for and the expectation of a classless society illustrates Toller's political naïveté in the early war years. The call for an ill-defined social justice occurred even in 'Auf, erwacht!', the early poem quoted by Toller in Eine Jugend in Deutschland. The right to equality is presumably also the 'Recht' demanded by the German people previously in 'Steht eine Wacht in Frankreich'. The former poem tells us that the claim has been suspended while the current poem gives a definite deadline for the advancement of this claim, 'wenn des Friedens Lichter tagen'.

The new society that this will give rise to will dispose of 'Stank und Klagen', the kind of social conditions described in the poem 'Der Heiland geht durch die Vorstadt', to be discussed presently. This new order will also do away with the conditions which produced the 'Knecht, der Karren müde zog'. In Eine Jugend in Deutschland, Toller tells of 'Louis mit der Karre', the simple-minded street sweeper in his home town of Samoczin, who was plagued incessantly by children, and whose greatest aspiration was to use a three- rather than a two-wheeled cart for his work. [GW IV 32] His plight evidently moved Toller to the extent that he appears in one of his poems as well. Again, as in 'Auf, erwacht!' his instinctive sympathy for the oppressed and his sense of justice are evident. Both poems contain a vague and stylised description of the problem without any specific analysis or prescription. It is hardly surprising that Toller should want to achieve the classless and secular society he desired by the most rapid means possible, and this leads in the earlier Expressionist poems to a faith in social restructuring through the Messianic *Dichter*.

The poetic perspective in the poem could be described as that of the political orator exhorting an uneasy audience to accept the war but at the same time assuring them that this does not entail forfeiting their legitimate political claims. Although there is no direct textual link with Die Wandlung, this is the kind of view which Friedrich might have propounded before going off to fight in the colonial war. It is certainly not what he would have espoused afterwards. Toller is suggesting he has a perspective which can enlighten those not as able as himself to see the issues as clearly.

The poem employs many of the stylistic devices of early Expressionism. The words of the Bundesrat will be etched into 'Altäre, steingeformt' and 'erzne Tafeln'. The cumulative alliteration of hard consonants in 'klagen [...] Knecht [...] Karren' and the tendency to begin lines with 'Und' are also frequently employed

Expressionist poetic devices. The enjoiner 'Fort mit' is augmented through repetition, and 'Gedenkt des Worts' recurs at crucial points in the poem. It occurs at the beginning, around the mid-point and at the end, gaining in its repetition an exclamation mark, suggesting a build-up of emotional intensity towards the Expressionist *Schrei*. The words to be remembered in the first and third repetitions are the words of the Bundesrat, but the central repetition refers to 'Tut eure Pflicht' stressing that, while equality is important, the overriding current concern is unity in order to win the war, without which victory the social aims may not be achieved. This change of emphasis also balances the idea of rights and duties, and attaches to them equal importance. The introduction of 'Doch' after the second instance refocuses the attention of the reader on the wider aims of victory in the war.

Within the framework provided by this repetition, there are some other devices present here which were to be developed in later poems. The final line, for example, is detached to emphasise the moral of the poem and its urgency. Some repetitions in the poem have the effect of enhancement: the first 'Schreibt' refers to the rather domestic 'Mauern, Türen, Wände', while the second progresses to altars. This device of *Steigerung* is common in political oratory in general and is particularly frequently used by Toller, above all in speeches referring to this period such as the 'Rede bei dem Meeting zum Gedächtnis der Toten des Weltkriegs'. [GW I 157-159]

A more subtle exploration of the uncertainties beginning to plague Toller is to be found in 'Sämann-Soldat'. [APP] The poem is broadly Expressionist in style, but is more significant in that it both depicts and explores the dream/reality dichotomy which featured in the dramas of Strindberg and Wedekind, and which was to become a structural element of *Die Wandlung*. The intentional ambiguity of the title sets the tone for a series of dualities and ambivalences which are not resolved during the poem. We are never sure if we are in France or in Germany, whether the figure at the centre of the poem is a soldier or a farmer, whether he is fighting or tending to the land. It is of course possible that behind the wave of conquering German troops, farmer-soldiers may have been deployed to work the newly gained land in order to provide much-needed food for the frontline troops and the home population.

The opening line leaves the reader totally uncertain as to which interpretation of the title to adopt. The 'starke Faust' is equally necessary both for fighting and for agricultural work, while 'durchpflügen' in addition to its literal sense could also describe the movement of the German army through France. Like

troops, the horses are moving 'Schritt für Schritt'. This ambiguity suggests a moral equivalence between the farmer and the soldier. Both are bound to the land, and are obliged to overcome it by force, and both do it on behalf of 'Weib und Kind'. Eighteen years later Toller described what must have been the background to the poem in Eine Jugend in Deutschland. He had been posted to an artillery regiment near Pont à Mousson, and describes the effect that the war has had on the French countryside. In his description he makes clear the contrast between the constructiveness of the farmer's work and the negativity of the war:

[...] das Dorf, in dem Eltern und Ureltern wohnten, wird zerschossen, den Acker pflügen Kanonen, die Saat streuen Granaten, die Ernte, die wächst, heißt Tod und Heimatlosigkeit. [GW IV 61]

There is no trace here of the moral ambivalence in the poem about the relative morality of the soldier and the farmer. With the perspective of 1933 and of all that he had experienced by that time, Toller was unable any longer to indulge such ambiguity. Perhaps on re-reading the poem Toller felt that he needed to put the record straight on some aspects, retaining the poem's internationality while distancing himself much more explicitly from the concept of the justified war, which is not fully explored in the poem.

The poem is not limited to speculation about the relative merits of peacetime and wartime activities. The interesting development is that Toller suggests an equivalence also between the (presumably) French farmer and the German farmer. We are not left merely to assume that the French farmer's priority is also his 'Scholle' and his 'Weib und Kind', it is actually made explicit in the line 'Hält ihn die Erde, die er Jahr um Jahr bebaut?'. His working of the land implies proprietary rights, and Toller is open-minded about his right to fight to regain his land, even with 'Haß und Bitterkeit'. The figure in the poem obviously finds these considerations troubling, hence the final line 'Hüh, Schwarzer zieh!', as the soldier/farmer forces his mind to return to his work and to suspend these equivocations.

In Eine Jugend in Deutschland Toller recounts the plight of the occupied French sympathetically, and there must indeed have been understanding amongst the German soldiers for the wretched condition of their civilian victims. In particular Toller describes the empathy between German soldiers and French farmers:

Soldaten und Bauern sind freundlich zueinander, sie kennen sich und ihre alltäglichen Gewohnheiten, sie vertrauen sich und schütteln den Kopf beim Wort Krieg, sie schimpfen gemeinsam über sinnlose Kommandobefehle, und

wenn die Frauen des Dorfes antreten müssen zu niedriger Arbeit, fluchen sie gemeinsam >Merde<. [GW IV 61-62]

Some aspects of the poem have evidently been reworked into the later autobiography: mutual understanding, acceptance of the communality of their experience, the misgivings about the destructiveness of war and respect for their womenfolk. The common tasks and interests of the two farmers underline the point that the most basic priorities of life are of a supranational nature, and that the idea of fighting against people whose primary concerns are so close to one's own is unnatural, puzzling and therefore, by extension, morally questionable. What we see here as incipient doubt becomes shock and outrage in 'Mütter', when Toller uncovers in a trench the unidentifiable remains of a soldier. 'Sämann-Soldat' also shows Toller beginning to develop a proto-socialist perspective on political problems. The farmers here are not defined by their nationality but by the nature of their work and their common *Bodenverbundenheit*.

The poem makes a strongly patriotic beginning, evoking the solid *bodenständig* German virtues, stressed in war propaganda, through the choice of nouns: 'Scholle [...] Faust [...] Erde [...] Weib und Kind [...] Herd'. The structural caesura which introduces the reverie section is heralded by the repetition of 'die Pferde' and the addition of 'hängen'. The whole poem is left suspended, and the central figure of the poem drifts by association of ideas to contemplation of his declared enemy. The reference to the horses in the final line snaps the poem back together again.

The successfully conveyed daydream atmosphere of this poem recurs in one of the late Expressionist war poems, 'Gang zur Ruhestellung', where a soldier returning from the front drifts off into reminiscences at the sight of a mass grave, as a kind of self-protection strategy. In the current poem the daydream is much more innocuous, suggesting that it dates from before the lowest point of Toller's war experiences. Some support for this comes from the fact that it occupies the same sheet as 'Steht eine Wacht in Frankreich' in the N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv in Koblenz. However, such details cannot be taken as providing a reliable source of information, given our lack of knowledge about the provenance of the Koblenz poems.

It is not the case that the finding of an unidentifiable corpse in the trenches, which formed the basis of the later published poem 'Mütter', was a kind of Damascene revelation to Toller, who up to that point had fought on doggedly and unquestioningly, as the good soldier should. This, and, in its own way, the previous poem examined in this chapter, show Toller consciously suppressing his

doubts about the moral rectitude of the war. This poem stands out in that the process of questioning is reflected not just in the content of the poem but in its very structure, demonstrating considerable poetic expertise. While his horrific experience in the trenches certainly crystallised the thoughts he had tried to deny to himself, it was also the culmination of misgivings documented in these poems. The stages in this process shown in these poems accord accurately with its description in Eine Jugend in Deutschland. It would therefore be wrong to see the war chapters in the autobiography as an *ex post facto* rewriting of Toller's personal history, where he carefully plans out a growing disillusionment with the war; rather these poems point clearly to the chapters in his autobiography being accurate in their description of his overall development.⁵

In March 1915 Toller volunteered for frontline duty and remained there until May 1916 when, digging in the trenches near Verdun, he found the unidentifiable corpse. This was the culmination of a series of traumatic experiences, and provoked a physical and mental collapse. Toller spent until September in hospitals and sanatoria, and in the invalid company at Mainz. He then signed up for the winter semester at Munich University, but it was not until 4 January 1917 that he was officially pronounced 'kriegsuntauglich, aber dauernd arbeitsverwendungsfähig'.⁶ Up till New Year 1916/17, therefore, Toller had constantly to live with the possibility that he could be returned at any time to the front. The fear at that prospect is communicated vividly in the poem 'Sylvester 1916'. [APP]

The exact setting is not clear, but it is perhaps a strength of the poem that the situation is not spelled out. One could imagine Toller looking in the mirror and seeing, instead of his own face, a death's head, a haunting reminder either of what he had already experienced or of what he feared may still have lain in wait for him. The association of war with skeletons and skulls features prominently in his first drama Die Wandlung. This skull is the subject both of 'Höhnt' and 'Donnert': after his initial double-take, the death's head reconstitutes itself as his own face screaming in rage and fear. There is none of the bravado towards death in this poem that we found in the earlier 'Lumpenlied'. In the final line, the fear and anger dissolve into despair, as Toller curses his own existence. The anger against

⁵ The creative refiguration of autobiographical material is more of an issue in the Briefe aus dem Gefängnis than in Eine Jugend in Deutschland. See Frühwald, 'Exil als Ausbruchsversuch' op. cit., pp. 489-498.

⁶ Quoted in Frühwald and Spalek, op. cit., p. 12.

the Creator here reminds us of the scene in the chapter 'Kindheit' in Eine Jugend in Deutschland, where the infant Toller tries to kill the God he feels is responsible for the suffering he sees around him. [GW IV 17-19]

There is also an element of personal guilt in the poem. The death's head taunts him with the phrase 'sei ein Mann': it is quite conceivable that this had been a reproof he received when undergoing his traumatic collapse. He may well have reproached himself too for studying while his comrades were still in the thick of the action, and this might explain why in April 1919, when the defence of the Councils Republic in Munich began to crumble and Toller relinquished military command, he requested to be allowed to return as an ordinary soldier to the battle for Dachau. [GW IV 155]

Though the inspiration for the poem was deeply emotional and disturbing, it is nonetheless a disciplined piece of work and gains in its effectiveness from this. It is short and powerful, avoiding the temptation to expand its ideas and reduce their efficacy. While the first line scans, the metre becomes chopped and irregular as the poem progresses, reflecting the deterioration in Toller's state of mind. The verbs 'Höhnt' and 'Donnert' provide balance both to the structure and to the ideas, the taunting of the death's head and Toller's reaction to it. The alliteration in the first and last lines also support this balance. In this poem we see the form becoming an integral part of the message, rather than merely a suitable convention for a particular topos.

The fear, guilt and disillusionment in 'Sylvester 1916' turn to outright disenchantment in 'Der Meister'. [APP] As so often in the study of Toller, there is no documentary evidence to suggest the specific person or event which may have inspired a particular work. This poem would appear to come from Toller's student days in either Grenoble, Munich or Heidelberg. As the object of the poem is described as 'germanisch', this makes Grenoble very unlikely, as he describes its university in Eine Jugend in Deutschland as a thinly-disguised propaganda centre for French culture. Munich is possible but also unlikely given that Toller describes his time there positively, perhaps because it formed such a civilised contrast to his time in the trenches. Heidelberg is the most likely setting: Toller describes the university there as a 'Doktorfabrik', where he had suggested to him a dissertation on 'Schweinezucht in Ostpreußen'. He talks also of the 'Einpauker' and obviously has little respect for the standard of teaching, which would be consistent with the intentions of this poem. [GW IV 80]

The poem would appear to come from the phase of disillusionment with the war and questioning of the social order which allowed it to come about. He is

distancing himself from the notion of *germanisch*, a status to which he had previously aspired. He finds the unearned 'Ruhmbänder' of the lecturer offensive in the light of his own experiences, but most of all he mistrusts this easily generated yet powerful 'centralfeuerige Glut', the ability to manipulate audiences. This same ability was the object of attack not only in his later poem 'An die Dichter', but also in the figures of the Kommissar des Tages in *Die Wandlung* and Der Namenlose in *Masse Mensch*. It is possible that the venom with which he attacks it here stems from his own feelings of deception resulting from the disparity between the pro-war propaganda he had been subjected to as a school pupil and the reality of life in the trenches.

The title is clearly ironic, and what follows is a highly personal attack based on several sources of resentment. He despises what he sees as the intellectual shallowness of the lecturer, whose words 'schreiten nur über Grund/(Stolpern nie über Tiefe)' - the very depths which Toller had been obliged to examine as a result of his war experiences. There is a certain sexual jealousy arising from the adulation of the blue stockings, which he feels the lecturer cultivates. His description of him as 'Germanischer [...] Priester' contains an implicit note of ethnic resentment from Toller, the (to his mind at least) unassimilated Jew. 'Priester' suggests one who hands down ideas and concepts not in order for them to be subjected to rigorous critical appraisal but as items of faith to be accepted without question: this is not a teacher who encourages students to think for themselves. There is also a vague hint of paganism in this description, as though what is going on is almost a religious ritual to which Toller does not have access. Finally, the mention of 'Ruhmbänder' implies that Toller resents this young and presumably able-bodied man avoiding the war experiences which he had undergone, the consequences of which were portrayed so vividly in 'Sylvester 1916'.

The fundamental strategy of the poem is the illustration of *Schein und Sein*, as Toller tries to demonstrate the reality of this man whom others have obviously not seen through. He contrasts 'Lippen' with 'Herz', in order to suggest that the lecturer is not revealing his true ideas. His words 'schreiten' because they deal with superficialities ('Grund'), whereas those who engage with more profound ideas ('Tiefe') inevitably - but honestly - 'stolpern'. Underlying all this is a deep sense of betrayal: the lecturer happens to be the focus of Toller's bitterness about his disillusionment after enthusiastically embracing the war, just as the father figure performed a similar function in Expressionist drama.

While being enigmatic to the point of obscurity and generally lacking in quality, the poem does demonstrate some linguistic inventiveness, not dissimilar to

the poetry of August Stramm, who was to be so influential on Toller's later war poems. The expression 'Seine Augen küssen' is economic, effective and evocative. Using compounds, Toller forms neologisms mostly of adjectives but also of some verbs: 'röckebesetzt [...] schmuckzieren [...] getagebucht [...] centralfeuerig [...] kunstverhalten [...] purpurt'. Although original, some of these images are too specific to allow us to do more than guess at their intended meaning - suggesting in its turn that the poem is of a very specific and highly personal nature.

This led Toller to lose his objectivity and as a result his better poetic judgement. Instead of allowing his irony to state his case, he constantly goes one step further, becoming so explicit as to undermine his own position. The triple repetition of 'Wie er [...]' reveals his exasperation. He cannot resist underlining the moral to his reader in the line 'Wie er kunstverhalten ist', and instead of allowing 'purpurt gläsernes Herz' to work its effect through irony, he feels compelled to add the final 'nicht', to ensure that the reader does not miss the point. This jealousy is not characteristic of Toller: few of those who have made biographical comments on him fail to mention his underlying generosity of spirit. It is perhaps because this is an unnatural attitude and a venting of frustrations and resentments that Toller fails to control his ideas in verse.

The four poems considered thus far in this chapter chart Toller's increasing alienation from authoritarian Wilhelmine society. It is interesting that the two poems indicating his own doubts address the issues in a general manner or in the third person. It is as though by externalising his own misgivings he is hoping at least to gain an objective perspective on them, even perhaps to exorcise them. The poems of disillusionment on the other hand are highly personal, as Toller is forced to accept that he has been attempting to deny reality. It is at this low point in his own development that Toller took part in the formation of the *Kulturpolitischer Bund der Jugend in Deutschland* at Heidelberg, a group promoting social regeneration through, amongst other things, the efforts of its artists. The group dissolved fairly rapidly once it came to the attention of the authorities, who felt that it aimed to undermine the German war effort, and indeed Toller may have over-emphasised its notoriety in his autobiography. Nonetheless, he had begun to engage with the political realities of his time, and although his understanding of and response to these realities were characterised by the stylisations of early Expressionist literature, the practical consequences of this engagement were all too real.

2.2 Opposition to the war

Toller's participation in the *Kulturpolitischer Bund der Jugend in Deutschland* marked the beginning of a political involvement which was, over the next eighteen months, to snowball in a way in which he could never initially have envisaged. The tenor of the poetry now ceased to have a personal focus, as he began to write for specific audiences. A friend from his Heidelberg student days, Margarete Turnowsky-Pinner, tells of how he read deeply moving war poems to small groups of students involved in the *Kulturpolitischer Bund*, and of how he would leave notes for her written half in prose, half in poetry.⁷ Politics was not so much a matter of analysis and policy at this stage: he viewed it as a moral, cultural, even aesthetic concern, as the programme of the *Kulturpolitischer Bund*, which he helped to draft, makes clear. Furthermore, the chosen medium for his response is often poetry which, while presenting him with a means of articulation, also by definition sets the boundaries and terms of his expression and perceptions, and therefore also of his actions.

In the first part of this section those poems will be examined which were written for specific purposes during the period 1916 to 1918 and which were not published. Then we will consider those poems written towards the end of this period which begin to be published with 'Marschlied' in 1918. The publication of these latter poems reflects Toller's growing self-confidence and his desire to reach for an audience beyond the sitting rooms of his fellow students.

2.2.1 Unpublished poetry

Of the unpublished poems two, 'Brief' and 'Legende', are from the N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv in Koblenz and one, 'Nacht im Priesterwald', is held at the Deutsches Literaturarchiv in Marbach am Neckar. The latter poem is actually dated 21 April 1917, and is likely to be the first of these poems to have been composed. [APP] 'Brief' is dated 1917, and it will be argued that it stems from November or December of that year during Toller's involvement in the *Kulturpolitischer Bund*. [APP] 'Legende' was used, if not written, in the January or February of the following year during Toller's participation in agitation in favour of the munitions workers' strikes in Munich. [APP]

⁷ Turnowsky-Pinner, op. cit., pp. 218-219.

'Nacht im Priesterwald' is likely to be a *Nachdichtung*, based on Theodor Däubler's poem of the same year, 'Geheimnis':

Der Vollmond steigt auf steilen Kupferstufen
Sehr rasch ins taubeblaute Feigenland.
Ein Tier, das starb, hat ihn emporerufen;
Ein Vogel? Streichelt ihn die Silberhand? [...]
Nur still, wie gut die Silberampel glimmt:
Der Mond ist Wald und Wesen holdgesinnt.⁸

The very beginning and the metre are similar to those of Däubler; and the references to 'Silberhand' and 'Silberampel' are reminiscent of the 'Zitterhänden, / Gewebt aus feinstem Silberlinnen'. It may be the case that, having read Däubler's poem, Toller is here considering in his own form some of its ideas, especially that contained in the last couplet quoted. Frühwald points out that on 25 January 1918, some nine months after the date of composition of this poem, Toller gave a reading from his works in Lecture Hall 224 of Munich University. Amongst other things, he read *Nachdichtungen* of poems by Morgenstern, Werfel and significantly Däubler, and it is quite conceivable that this poem was amongst them.⁹

There is also a possible influence here stemming from August Stramm and from the linguistic ideas of the Futurist Marinetti. In the following lines, Toller uses intransitive verbs transitively, transforming what should be adverbs or adverbial phrases into objects: 'Der Vollmond fließt azurne Ströme' and 'Die Blut und Eiter klebrig rinnen'. The readiness to circumvent normal grammatical conventions is a characteristic especially of Stramm's later poems: 'Abendgang', for example, contains the *Neubildungen* of 'schmiege Nacht' and 'schlafe Erde'.¹⁰ Here, verbs are transformed into adjectives which do not exist as such in the German language. The general impact of Stramm's poetry on that of Toller will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 5, but it is suggested that in this case Toller perceived Stramm's flexible attitude towards grammatical conventions and was tempted to use similar devices - here to good effect.

⁸ Theodor Däubler, 'Geheimnis', in Theodor Däubler: Dichtungen und Schriften, ed. by Friedhelm Kemp, Munich, 1956, p. 230.

⁹ See note 1.

¹⁰ August Stramm, 'Abendgang', August Stramm: Das Werk, ed. by René Radrizzani, Wiesbaden, 1963, p. 40.

The technique of contrasting natural beauty with man-made horror is fundamental to 'Nacht im Priesterwald'. Until the caesura following 'Um Bäume' in the second line, the reader is prepared for a poem perhaps on the natural beauties of the Bois-le-Prêtre; this illusion is shattered first of all by the aggressive pairing 'zerfetzt zerschossen' and subsequently by the vocabulary of horror, 'Krüppel [...] Schreckmorästen [...] Blut und Eiter [...] Blutmeer'. The revival of the poetic conventions which commenced the poem - 'Mit gleißend kühlen Zitterhänden, / Gewebt aus feinstem Silberlinnen' - is now clearly an ironic comment on the pretensions of poetry in the face of the physical reality of war. The adherence to convention whilst undermining its connotations is also conveyed by the strict metrical consistency of the poem. It can be seen that he is here distancing himself from the *Jugendstil* and *neuromantisch* poetry he once wrote and the influences he followed. What is an implication here becomes explicit comment in 'Aufrüttelung', the introductory poem to Die Wandlung.

The scene described in the poem - the mutilation both of the forest and of the combatants - is very close to the following emotive passage from Eine Jugend in Deutschland:

Zerschossener Wald, zwei armselige Worte. Ein Baum ist wie ein Mensch. Die Sonne bescheint ihn, er hat Wurzeln, die Wurzeln stecken in Erde, der Regen wässert sie, die Winde streichen über sein Geäst, er wächst, er stirbt, wir wissen wenig von seinem Wachsen und noch weniger von seinem Sterben. [...] Ein Wald ist ein Volk. Ein zerschossener Wald ist ein gemeucheltes Volk. Die gliedlosen Stümpfe stehen schwarz im Tag, und auch die erbarmende Nacht verhüllt sie nicht, selbst die Winde streichen fremd über sie hinweg. [GW IV 64]

The sight of the Bois-le-Prêtre in such a mutilated condition was obviously indelibly stamped on Toller's consciousness; but, more importantly, he here makes explicit the link between the trees and man himself. A similarly explicit identification is to be found in the poem which we shall postulate later as 'Der Entwurzelte':

Sei ruhig, Bruder, trockne Deine Tränen.
Sei Erdreich!
Baum!
Der in Dir wissend Wurzel schlägt.

The idea of roots, of belonging, is central to the early poetry and to Die Wandlung, and Toller's chosen symbol for this range of ideas was the tree. It may well have been his close personal association of the two which made the sight of the mutilated wood so distressing for him. He significantly appends 'wurzellos' in 'Nacht im

Priesterwald' to the Expressionist 'Entsetzensschrei' which is the only possible response to the sight.

There is no clear biographical context for the letter which inspired the poem 'Brief', and it is not apparent whether Toller is replying to a personal letter or to something printed in a pacifist publication. The date 1917 is attributed to the poem and, judging by the elements which Toller cites from the original letter, it might be assumed that it was written after the October revolution. One possibility is that this is a contact Toller made after moving to Berlin in December 1917 and becoming involved with Kurt Eisner and other pacifist and socialist figures, but it is more likely a response from abroad to the activities of the *Kulturpolitischer Bund*. In a reply to an attack by the *Deutsche Vaterlandspartei* which was printed in the newspapers and reproduced in his autobiography, Toller writes:

Wir empfinden Achtung vor den Studenten in fremden Ländern, die gegen die unfassbare Sinnlosigkeit und Entsetzlichkeit des Krieges, gegen jegliche Militarisierung schon jetzt protestieren. [GW IV 83]

It is certainly possible that this poem is Toller's reaction to a message of support from revolutionary Russia. It is of course significant that this response is in verse, the medium to which at this time Toller most naturally resorted.

To reinforce the element of response Toller constructs the first and second stanzas in a similar manner, and in order to underline the contrast between their views gently but forcefully he repeats the beginnings of the sentences 'Wir alle [...]'. The third stanza makes explicit the moral of the contrast, that the acts of physical degradation do not impair the positive potential of the human spirit. Relations between groups of people are arbitrary, as are national and class divisions, and they can be overcome through the decision of the people. If human beings create barriers, they can remove them through the acceptance of their 'Mensch-Sein'. This is the positive potential which he sees arising from the horror he felt when he uncovered the unidentifiable corpse, enabling him to perceive in full the arbitrariness of war.

Richard Dehmel, whom Toller had met shortly before at the Burg Lauenstein conference, stated in his own poem 'Weltkriegsmoral' that 'Massenmord ward Sittlichste der Sitten'. In the Russian's words we find here a similar view, 'Dem Elend des Lebens glaubten wir / Durch Kindermorden zu entfliehen'. Life itself - as long as it belongs to an enemy - ceases to have any value, and in fact the taking of life becomes not just a release but even a moral value in itself. In his reply, Toller does not equivocate at all about war, rejecting it completely as being fundamentally *unmenschlich*, an underlying theme in his later war poems.

Unlike 'Nacht im Priesterwald', the tone of the poem is positive and it is forward-looking. It stresses the way in which people are empowered, were they but aware of it, to control their own destinies. If wars between peoples can be stopped by the exercise of their will, then it follows that they are also able fundamentally to change the society within which they live. The simplicity and directness of this appeal is mirrored in the language, which is uncluttered, effective and not without its points of interest, such as the eye-catching and thought-provoking syntax, enjambement and alliteration in the middle of the third strophe.

Such virtues could hardly be claimed of 'Legende', the final poem we shall consider in this section. In January and February 1918 Toller was involved in raising support for strikes by munitions workers in Munich, as he tells in Eine Jugend in Deutschland:

Ich gehe in die Streikversammlungen, ich möchte helfen, irgend etwas tun,
ich verteile, weil ich glaube, daß diese Verse, aus dem Schrecken des
Krieges geboren, ihn treffen und anklagen, Kriegsgedichte unter die Frauen,
die Lazarett- und Krüppelszenen aus meinem Drama >Die Wandlung<.
[GW IV 88]

The poem could well have been one of those he distributed, as the second strophe refers directly to armaments factories, it is aimed at women and its aim is to discourage armaments production.

In order to achieve this, Toller writes a version of the myth current in both Germany and England at the time that women involved directly in war betray themselves as givers of life and are therefore accursed.¹¹ Toller was so taken with

¹¹ Similar ideas are expressed in the poem 'Women at munition making' by Mary Gabrielle Collins, a British First World War poet. The hands of women munitions workers 'should minister unto the flame of life' but are 'coarsened in munitions factories' and 'take part in defacing and destroying the natural body'. As in 'Legende', this is a betrayal of the women's proper functions and it is expressed in religious terms:

O God! [...]

[...] we have marvelled at the seeming annihilation

Of Thy work.

But this goes further,

Taints the fountain head,

Mounts like a poison to the Creator's very heart.

While similar ideas are expressed, the general tone of the poem is much more sympathetic towards the plight of the women than that of 'Legende'. Mary Gabrielle Collins, 'Women at munition making', from Branches unto the sea, London, 1916; featured in Scars upon my heart: women's poetry and verse of

it that a version of this particular myth recurs in the third *Bild* of Masse Mensch, when the Frau is encouraging a general strike:

Und Frauen ihr!
Kennt ihr Legende jener Weiber,
Die ewig fruchtlos,
Weil sie Waffen mitgeschmiedet? [GW II 83]

The title of the poem even receives a mention in the text. We may find this particular cautionary tale rather unconvincing, but Toller obviously still felt it to have some resonance as late as the composition of Masse Mensch in October 1919.

The aim of the poem was to unsettle what Toller considered to be impressionable and susceptible women and to pressure them into a strike. It is hard not to imagine the reaction of the hard bitten, working class industrial workers to this approach. While undoubtedly there were many North Germans amongst the workforce, Toller would have been very well aware that the majority of the female workers would be Bavarian Catholics. As a result, this poem is targetted not just at Christians but, with the prominent role played by the Virgin Mary, specifically at Catholics. Toller must have assumed that the working class Catholics he was trying to influence maintained their beliefs on an instinctual rather than a critical level, because the poem is unashamedly superstitious in tenor. It is written too in a very simple and narrative manner, and Toller is clearly here trimming the Expressionist tenor of his other poetry in order not to alienate a working class audience.

The opening lines seek to make it clear to the women that they cannot dissociate themselves from the consequences of their work and that they in a very real sense are killing the children of other women.¹² It is notable that Toller does not restrict this myth only to German women: consistent with his supranational

the First World War, ed. by Catherine W. Reilly, Cambridge, 1989, p. 24.

¹² It is interesting that this point is also to be found in Brecht's play Die Mutter (1933). The Bolshevik Pelagea Wlassowa berates women bringing household copper to a collection point for the Russian war effort in the following terms:
Aber ihr seid Mörderinnen, wie ihr da steht! Kein Tier würde sein Junges hergeben, so wie ihr das eure: Ohne Sinn und Verstand für eine schlechte Sache. Euch gehört der Schoß ausgerissen. Er soll verdorren und ihr sollt unfruchtbar werden, wie ihr da steht.
Bertolt Brecht, Werke (große kommentierte Berliner und Frankfurter Ausgabe), Bd. 3, Berlin/Weimar and Frankfurt am Main, 1993, pp. 261-324, here p. 322.

view of war, he sees all such women as damned, irrespective of their country of origin.

The first figure to be affected by the women's lament is the Devil, who asks Christ in vain to have the women damned to eternal silence. To underline what he sees as the evil of armaments production, Toller repeats two ideas introduced in the second strophe and associates them directly with Satan. The women's lament, like the 'ätzende Säuren' in the bombs, corrodes his ears and surrounds his eyes 'wie giftiges Gas'. Christ's reaction to the women's plight is initially sympathetic in view of the tribulations they have undergone as a result of the war. Ultimately however this does not extend far enough to raise the curse, and he maintains the rigid line of his father. The strophe dealing with God's reaction gives a different slant to the association of poppy fields with war: drops of blood fall to the earth as he presses his nails into his palms in frustration, each drop producing a poppy.

Of all the heavenly host, one would have expected the Virgin Mary to be a champion of women and to be most sympathetic to their plight. It is left unsaid, but her hard reaction to their situation clearly stems from the betrayal of their womanhood, which she herself symbolises in all its most positive aspects. Her body is 'gesegnet' not just because she is the mother of Christ, but precisely because she has produced a child, in contrast to these women who are 'verdammt'. Help comes for the women when, in the most excruciatingly sentimental passage in the poem, the cherubic unborn intercede on their behalf. The pity which this generates moves God to lift the curse and allow the women to die in peace, upon which young deer play around their leafy graves.

Toller's view of women here is consistent with that expressed in his early love poems and even - though more sensitively handled - in later poems such as 'Schwangeres Mädchen auf dem Gefängnishof'. Women are seen as truly valid only in their fecundity, and their capacity to produce offspring defines their role. Once this is removed, they must remain unfulfilled. Although sympathy eventually wins the day in 'Legende', the rejection of the women for their infertility is not portrayed in any way as morally unjustifiable.

'Legende' is undoubtedly a poor poem, but it is not without significance. Toller attempts here the epic style and scale which he was to put to much better effect in 'Der Ringende', 'Aufrüttelung', 'Leichen im Priesterwald' and 'Mütter'. And while war forms the backdrop both to this poem and to 'Nacht im Priesterwald', Toller uses poetry here not to move or to make the reader reflective but as a political tool. The point of the poem was not its quality, but its

effectiveness in achieving the desired goal. Once more in his reaction to political challenges Toller's response is poetic.

2.2.2 Published poems

The poems to be examined next were all published in the period from 1918 to 1921 in journals heavily influenced by Expressionism and critical of the war. In most cases the poems show a development of sureness of poetic touch and the themes they examine recur both in his early dramas and the later verse collection Vormorgen.

In Vormorgen, 'Marschlied' [AS 48, PBDG 277] is dated by Toller as 1915 but, alone of the poems in this section, it found publication beforehand in Die Aktion in 1918, a version containing one extra stanza.¹³ This periodical provided a forum for the war poetry of many writers, most notably for that of Wilhelm Klemm, in the regular section Verse vom Schlacht-Feld. The quality of the poems published is consistently high, and the publication of 'Marschlied' represented a considerable achievement for Toller, besides being in all likelihood the first poem he had published. The delay between 1915, the attributed date of composition, and 1918, the year of publication, suggests that Toller carried the ideas for the poem around with him, but that it only found its form some time later. Certainly his conception of the nature and function of war poetry developed during that time.

The poem contains an atmosphere of almost tragic inevitability. As with many of the Verse vom Schlacht-Feld, there is a full evocation of the misery and sadness of war in general, but no criticism of the aims or methods of this particular war. In view of the strict censorship pertaining during the First World War, outright criticism was not a serious possibility; but even so, there is no suggestion that the war need not have come about, or any call that it should not continue. In general, we find that nationalities are not mentioned in Toller's war poetry, the exception to this being 'Leichen im Priesterwald'; but here, too, the poem rises specifically above national boundaries. Nor is there any mention of enmities: the soldiers participate in the fighting because it is their lot, not because of any hatred of the enemy. The *Siegreich wollen wir Frankreich schlagen* of usual marching

¹³ 'Marschlied', Die Aktion, 8 (1918), p. 172. The extra stanza runs:

Wir fern aller Freude
Und fremd aller Qual.
Wir Blütenverwehte
Im nächtlichen Tal.

songs is replaced here by an emphasis on the communality of this experience. Toller draws attention to the general loss of human potential attendant on war - 'Wir Preis einer Mutter, / Die nie sich erfüllt' - and to the fact that all the fallen are some mother's son or some woman's husband, a point reiterated eventually in 'Mütter' and 'Leichen im Priesterwald'. The battle is no glorious one ('kranzlos'), and there are neither victors nor vanquished, merely 'Waisen der Erde'.

The word *stumm* in the final line is highly significant, and contains a certain ambiguity. Not only do the victims of war have no voice in the control of events; they are also unable to express their experiences, such is the scale of horror and the deadening effect of war. The fact that this, the first of Toller's war poems to be published, only appeared in 1918 suggests that this is the case with him too, that during his participation in the war his sensitivities were deadened to the extent that he could not formulate his experiences in verse. Toller would not be the only poet on whom war had this muting effect: after his release from the army he met Rainer Maria Rilke in a Munich bookshop, and the latter's explanation for his recent silence was striking enough for Toller to mention it in Eine Jugend in Deutschland - 'der Krieg hat mich stumm gemacht'. [GW IV 75]

The ironic form of the poem is also worthy of comment. *Marschlieder* are designed to infuse *esprit de corps*, boost morale and to take the minds of weary soldiers off war, such as in this example from the First World War by Alexander von Gleichen-Rußwurm:

Hurra! Die Schritte stampfen und dröhnen,
daß drob erzittert feindliches Land,
die grimmen Feinde müssen bald stöhnen,
sich winden unter der Siegerhand.¹⁴

Toller uses this form to undermine the normal intentions of marching songs. The monotonous, insistent metre is designed to reflect war-weariness rather than to overcome it, and the tenor of the poem is resigned and unalleviated rather than encouraging. Although it might not be considered among the best of his war poems, 'Marschlied' nonetheless shows Toller successfully turning an established form to his own purposes.

The atmosphere created by the poem is reminiscent of that in the first dream scene of Die Wandlung, where Toller portrays the soldiers going to the colonial war as being railroaded like cattle to the slaughter-house. There is also similarity in the diction:

¹⁴ Alexander von Gleichen-Rußwurm, 'Marschlied', quoted in Hermann Korte, Der Krieg in der Lyrik des Expressionismus, Bonn, 1981, p. 181.

SECHSTER SOLDAT:

Ziellos irren wir, furchtsame Kinder

Preisgegeben sinnloser Willkür

Morden, hungern, vollbringen gewaltige Taten.

Bleiben doch furchtsame Kinder

Schrecküberfallen von lichtloser Nacht. [GW II 22]

The description of the soldiers as 'Kinder', the sense of being 'Preisgegeben sinnloser Willkür' and the mention of *lichtlose Nacht* are indubitable compositional similarities. As with some of the early poems, it cannot be established whether the poem grew into or out of the play, but it can be assumed that the poem supports Toller's contention in prefacing the play that 'Diese Arbeit entstand als erste Niederschrift 1917'. [GW II 8]

'Menschen' and 'Soldaten' deal with the psychological aftermath of the First World War, the way in which participants were morally and emotionally drained. Unlike 'Menschen', 'Soldaten' does not appear in Vormorgen: it was published in similar versions in Rubiner's Expressionist anthology Kameraden der Menschheit and in the periodical Die Bücherkiste in 1919, and did not go through a process of shortening at any time.¹⁵ As shall be demonstrated shortly, the reduction of 'Menschen' to a single stanza substantially changes the emphasis, indeed the topos, of the poem.

The first version of 'Menschen' is a long and somewhat obscure poem and, owing to the enigmatic character of some of the images, a definitive interpretation is difficult. [APP] Nonetheless it may be possible to set the poem in a likely context. The first stanza clearly deals with the war, which in the opening line is personified. Toller shows people reacting in two ways: some merely accept the fact of war uncritically and participate; others fight in order 'nicht allein zu sein'. This may refer to the kind of motivation which prompts Friedrich in Die Wandlung to enlist, the fear of social isolation or the aspiration to social assimilation.

The second stanza begins with an allusion to the psychological shock of the reality of war and the helplessness of the individual - 'Ertrinkende die Arme kläglich recken'. Without mentioning explicitly the cessation of the war, Toller moves on to examine post-war attitudes. 'Den Schuldbeladnen wähten sie im Bruder' is unclear: it could refer to the *Dolchstoßlegende* which sought to place the

¹⁵ 'Menschen' appeared in its longer form in Kameraden der Menschheit, ed. by Ludwig Rubiner, Potsdam, 1919, pp. 62-63, and in its shorter form in Vormorgen (1924); 'Soldaten' also appeared in Rubiner's volume, on pp. 63-64, and in Die Bücherkiste, 1 (1919/20), H. 5/6/7, p. 70.

blame for Germany's defeat on those who had opposed or been equivocal about the war; but more likely it refers to the guilt for the war itself, which people from all political groupings sought to attribute to others. It might, however, also refer to the collapse of the munitions workers' strike and the infighting between the groupings on the Left, some of the consequences of which Toller described in the Briefe aus dem Gefängnis, and which form the likely frame of reference for 'An die Dichter'. The final stanza describes the way in which this hatred becomes ossified. War and its consequences have driven feeling and brotherly love out of people. Language serves to dissemble rather than to give expression to the truth: 'Die Worte, die sie sprachen, waren Masken'. People now fall into two categories, 'Mumien oder Grammophone', one incapable of communication and the other repeating the same old message.

Support for this interpretation comes from a dramatic scene published by Toller in 1921 which has received curiously little critical attention.¹⁶ In this 'panorame Szenenfolge', entitled Deutsche Revolution and submitted to Das Tage-Buch from prison in Niederschönenfeld, a wanderer figure and a one-eyed man watch the antics of the yellow and green monks. These monks represent the splinter groups of the Left, which treat their differences as more important than their similarities, elevating marginal doctrinal differences into matters of great principle and rigid faith: 'Man hat die Programme zu Dogmen erhoben - und von da bis zur Umwandlung der Parteien in kirchliche Organisationen war es nur ein kleiner Schritt'. [p. 359] The wanderer's appeal to the common task falls foul of the petty group differences, and the monks are left to form yet another grouping. The lines from the poem '[...] sie verhüllten psalmodierend ihre Köpfe / Und haßten sich' would seem to match up with the portrayal of the revolutionaries as monks. When one group speaks, the other falls silent and merely makes mute gestures, and this may be reflected in the lines 'Gleichgültig blickten sie sich an und fremd. / Die Worte, die sie sprachen, waren Masken.' In the following lines Toller would seem to be referring to the way in which he studied socialism systematically in military prison in 1917: 'Sie hatten nicht die Kraft, in Einsamkeiten zu entfliehn / Und dort zu wappnen sich mit dem kristallinen Panzer'. In an extract from the accompanying letter published in the periodical Toller seems to express a similar idea:

Das Gefängnis gibt Distanz und das Vermögen, die Dinge nicht leidenschaftsloser, sondern leidenschaftlicher und [...] klarer zu sehen sich

¹⁶ 'Deutsche Revolution', Das Tage-Buch, 2 (1921), H. 12, pp. 358-365.

wünschte, manchem unserer revolutionären Politiker ein Jahr Arbeit in Einsamkeit.¹⁷

Following this interpretation, the Vormorgen version represents a quite considerable change of emphasis. [AS 57] This version is only the third strophe of the earlier published version, and pruned even at that. 'Krieg' is the very first word, and there is subsequently nothing to suggest the post-revolutionary situation as a context, with the possible exception of 'die gekreißten Völker': this could refer to the peoples being in revolutionary labour, as it were, but it may just refer to the turmoil after the war. The poem has been reduced to three key concepts. The first is that of war, conveyed now by effective alliteration: 'Krieg [...] knöchern [...] gekreißten Völker krallte'. Then comes the idea of the mask, with 'Hüllen' and 'Masken' being brought into closer proximity by the omission of intervening lines. The same idea is conveyed as in the earlier published version, that of removing a mask merely to find another underneath. Finally, Toller ends the poem with the same image, 'Mumien oder Grammophone', which is here attributed to the war rather than to any political upheaval subsequent to it.

However, does the poem in this form actually predate the 1919 version, as Toller's dating would suggest? Certainly the extra dimension of the 1919 version is lacking, but this in itself could imply both that the Vormorgen version predates it and that it antedates it; that is to say, this dimension could have been built on to the original or culled because it was no longer topical. The resolution to this lies in the superior quality of the Vormorgen version: it is on balance a better poem with a tighter framework, making it consistent with an improvement in Toller's poetic abilities, and the form of the '1917' version fits into Vormorgen much better than that of the 1919 version.

'Soldaten' was published twice in the same year and deals explicitly with the post-war situation. [APP] Although it deals with a similar topic - the emotional exhaustion which follows war - it is far less alliterative and much more direct and personal, signalled by the initial word 'Ich'. The third and fourth lines address directly the problem of the social reintegration of the troops in peacetime, and the two comparisons, with factories and with prostitutes, serve to support the topos.

The two comparisons are rather interesting. The first compares war with a factory and is a successful image because it works on several levels. The first similarity is obviously the way in which both impose uniformity and stifle

¹⁷ This quote is reproduced exactly as it appears in Das Tage-Buch. Despite the syntactical *non sequitur*, its thrust is nonetheless clear.

individuality. Secondly, both make man into an extension of the machine, the factory by making him go through repetitive monotonous actions in operating equipment, and war through the idea of the *Materialschlacht*, of people being as expendable as machines. Thirdly, war makes people into objects known by numbers, and not by faces or characteristics, an idea which was to recur in the Vormorgen poems 'Alp' and 'Gang zur Ruhestellung'. Finally, there is a hint of a criticism of war as a capitalist undertaking which stimulates production and thus also profit, but does so by the exploitation of labour. This forms a link with the idea of the prostitutes, who are also physically exploited for the benefit of others. Yet even these people, traditionally the lowest of social forms, maintain their personality, while those who fight *pro patria* do not. This makes it a bitter comment on the treatment of soldiers returning home, which was in due course to be developed in Hinkemann. Once more there is the image of the mask which peels off only to reveal that another mask has formed underneath.

One of the main concerns of the poem is *Menschenschändung*: 'Vierjähriger Krieg hat [...] / Das Menschliche ihrer Gesichter bespien, da starb es, geschändet'. The final line contains the Expressionist apostrophe 'Gott! Bruder! Mensch!'. This poem indicates humanity while 'Mütter' points to the positive of *Menschlichkeit* which could arise from this bitter experience.

The first version of 'Leichen im Priesterwald' [APP] appeared in an anthology in 1921 with a considerably extended ending.¹⁸ It deals with Toller's discovery of the unidentifiable decomposing corpse. The poem begins directly with a horrific description of a pile of corpses, and when the horror no longer seems communicable through mere words, Toller resorts to the *Schrei*: 'Ein einzig grauenvoller Wahnsinns-Schrei!'. The use of the *Schrei* in situations where language no longer seems adequate to communicate horror has occurred also in 'Nacht im Priesterwald' and in 'Aufrüttelung'. This is followed by an apostrophe to the wives of the German and French dead: death has made these men equal by reducing them to their common physical denominator, while the appeal to the wives brings out the idea of their community in life, for every fallen man was some woman's husband or, as in 'Mütter', some mother's son. The intertwining of twisted corpses is a grotesque parody of any real international brotherhood which - never acknowledged in life - is mocked in death. It is a comment on the

¹⁸ 'Leichen im Priesterwald', Verkündigung, ed. by Rudolf Kayser, Munich, 1921, p. 251.

perversity of life that this brotherhood, even in grotesque form, can only be found in death.

The frightful anonymity is reminiscent of the following passage from Eine Jugend in Deutschland:

Nun kann ich an keinem Toten mehr vorbeigehen, ohne innezuhalten, sein Antlitz zu betrachten, dessen erdige Patina, eine undurchdringliche Mauer, ihn der vertrauten Zeit entrückt; wer warst Du, frage ich, von wo kommst Du, wer trauert um Dich? Niemals frage ich: Warum mußt Du sterben? Niemals: wer ist schuld? Alle verteidigen ihr Land, der Deutsche Deutschland, der Franzose Frankreich, alle erfüllen ihre Pflicht. [GW IV 70]

As in the above passage, Toller introduces the idea into the first version that those who follow the clarion-call of war under a false banner - that of nationalism - may in a sense be co-responsible for what takes place. It is the combatant's duty to humanity to rise up and to protest against a state of affairs which can allow this to happen, but the overriding imperative - for the meanwhile at least - is that of military duty, which is in direct conflict with the moral imperative which Toller feels but nonetheless manages to subordinate. The conflict between the two duties removes his ability adequately to express himself - 'stumm [...] stammle [...] schweige' - and induces the moribund dumbness of 'Marschlied'.

The Vormorgen version is substantially different from that of 1921. [AS 55, PBDG 279] As with the 1924 versions of 'Der Ringende', 'Mütter' and 'Menschen', the number of verses is reduced, and couplets and tercets are largely removed. The later poems are shorter, too, and less interpolated. In the case of this poem, the pruning of the final tercet alters its whole balance. The earlier published version split into two parts, the horrific descriptions and Toller's feelings of co-responsibility. This version breaks down into three parts: the description of the corpses, the parody of common humanity and a final short quatrain which introduces almost incidentally the element of co-responsibility, thus reducing the role it plays in the poem. By setting the mockery of brotherhood centrally, Toller makes it the focus of the poem. The single most important element of the first poem is the author's co-responsibility for the carnage of war; the most prominent theme in the second poem is the way in which war operates against real conceptions of brotherhood. In this way, the change of structure has also brought about a change of emphasis.

Similarly, the first version concentrates on Toller's inability either to cry out in protest at this state of affairs or to describe it. Words cannot convey the horror and, in this way, war can be said to have 'killed' language. The five words

expressing dumbness and incoherence in the 1921 poem - 'stumm [...] stammle [...] stammle [...] schweig [...] schweige' - are reduced to the one 'stumm' in the second version. This suggests that by 1924 this aspect of the war was no longer of such immediate concern to Toller; instead, with the removal of the final tercet, 'Geschändete' moves to prominence at the very end of the poem.

One final comment concerns the explicit nature of the first stanza. It is obviously a shock tactic designed to bring home to the reader a reality which is often sublimated in the process of war. In his thesis on Expressionist war poetry, Korte defends the use of such tactics which, he argues, are not:

[...] die perverse Freude am Fäkalischen, sondern die auf die Kriegsrealität abgehobene Destruktion der perversen Tabuisierung der Schlacht im Bild von 'Tanz und Fest' und der apologetischen Perversion des verklärenden Soldatentodes.¹⁹

The description contains a considerable element of the grotesque, a device sometimes used to communicate an idea which even the writer finds uncomfortably close, such as the description of a pile of bodies as 'ein Düngerhaufen'. Some things are so awful that they can only adequately be expressed in a metaphorical manner, and one such example is the dance and embrace of corpses, as in Armin T. Wegner's 'Grab der Gliedmaßen':

Abgemäht hat uns das Eisen alle
In des Todes bunte Mausefalle,
Brüderlich in lustigem Vereine
Heben wir die losen Arme, Beine,

Tanzen wir in unseren weißen Binden,
Jungfrau zart mit einer blutigen Schleppe,
Mondscheintänze unter Gartenlinden,
Bürger, Heiliger und Straßenschneppe.

Tanzen wir, bis daß wir stinken,
Frostgeschwärtzt im blauen Morgenstrahle,
Von den Hunden angenagt zum Mahle
In der kühlen Gartengruft versinken.²⁰

Aspects of this poem, written in 1914, are reminiscent both of 'Leichen im Priesterwald' and of Toller's first drama, Die Wandlung. Both poems show death

¹⁹ Korte, op. cit., p. 182.

²⁰ 'Grab der Gliedmaßen', in A. T. Wegner, Das Lazarett. Ein Kreis vom Tod und vom Leben, Berlin, 1914; the collection was reprinted by Kraus as Wegner, Die Straße mit den tausend Zielen, Nendeln, 1973, p. 51.

as the great leveller: in Wegner's poem death abolishes distinctions between, for example, 'Bürger' and 'Straßenschnepp', while in Toller's poem death removes international barriers and, in its own grotesque manner, demonstrates the internationality of mankind. Wegner's poem and Toller's play obviously share the *Totentanz* of the skeletons, which mocks the artificial divisions placed between them in life. On a comparison of the dates, it could be that Wegner's poem was influential during the formative phase of Die Wandlung, particularly given that Toller met Wegner at the conference at Burg Lauenstein.

'Mütter', or 'Den Müttern', appears in three different versions. A long version with an introductory stanza, ending in 'Schmerz, gebäre Tat!', appears in Rubiner's anthology of 1919; the second, adding a tercet, appears in an anti-war anthology in 1924; and in the same year a considerably shortened version was included in Vormorgen.²¹ Unlike 'Leichen im Priesterwald', with its opening of unremitting horror, the first two versions of this poem [APP] commence with a stanza of delicate poetry reminiscent of some of the diction of Toller's early verse: 'Aus weißen Lilien [...] sternhell überblaut'. With the unusual construction 'Die Euch Hoffnung, frohe Bürde', the second stanza seems about to continue in similar vein, but Toller springs the third line of this stanza on the reader: 'Liegen jäh zerfetzt in aufgewühlter Erde'. This method of arousing assumptions which are then dashed for effect occurs in 'Der Ringende' and 'Aufrüttelung', and to a certain extent in the Vormorgen war poems 'Morgen' and 'Geschützwache'. The contrast between expectations and harsh reality is expressed clearly in the following lines:

Die auf Feldern jubelnd stürmten,
Torkeln eingekerkert, wahnsinnsschwärend,
Blinde Tiere durch die Welt.

A reading of the chapters 'Kriegsfreiwilliger', 'Die Front' and 'Ich will den Krieg vergessen' from Eine Jugend in Deutschland shows this to be written from experience. The poem is, however, not just a plaint: the horror and the experience of it must lead beyond passive suffering to action. Toller warns against passivity, especially that sanctioned by the Christian view of suffering as a means to redemption in the afterlife, and concludes with the exhortation: 'Schmerz, gebäre Tat!'

The second version is exactly the same up to this point, but adds a final tercet to the *Aufruf zur Tat*:

²¹ 'Mütter', in Rubiner (ed.), op. cit., pp. 64-65; 'Mütter', in Nie wieder Krieg!, Berlin, 1924, p. 36; 'Den Müttern', Vormorgen, Potsdam, 1924.

Euer Leid, Millionen Mütter,
Dien' als Saat durchpflügter Erde,
Lasse keimen, schattenspendend, Menschlichkeit!

This qualifies the original exhortation to action by naming its object, 'Menschlichkeit'. Thus the poem moves from being an indictment of suffering and an expression of outrage to providing an indication of the values it could give rise to. In the same way Toller's war poetry as a whole defines *Unmenschlichkeit*, thereby tracing the limits of its opposite but positive pole, *Menschlichkeit*.

Nothing is actually added to the Vormorgen version, which is merely a scaled-down version of those preceding it. [AS 59] Just as 'Leichen im Priesterwald' reminds us that all the fallen had a loved one, 'Den Müttern' makes the similar point that all were some mother's son. The length of the poem is pruned and so, in some cases, is the diction, for example 'Die Euch Hoffnung' is simplified to 'Eure Hoffnung'. The principal omission is the opening stanza, which is also the case with the Vormorgen version of 'Der Ringende'. This provides a poetic focus to this version which the others lack: it concentrates on the horror of war and what should be the reaction to it, rather than widening the scope of the poem to include comment on pre-war expectations, which tends to diffuse its effect.

The idea of the mother is a recurring one in Toller's poetry, but it should not be taken too literally. William A. Willibrand, the first American to study Toller in depth, is certainly guilty of this in his dissertation of 1945:

At the age of eighteen or nineteen, Toller experienced a rather tremendous metaphysical yearning which was incomprehensible to his mother [...] She no longer understood him, and the young man decided that he must go through repeated birth throes in order to become his own mother.²²

Willibrand clearly does not see the mother as a multi-faceted metaphor, embracing such ideas as love of homeland and social belonging as well as changes in one's phases of life. Similarly, he interprets the poem 'Mütter' literally as a manifesto of direct action for European motherhood: 'This is the only instance where Toller suggests international action by mothers'.²³ While on one level Toller is certainly appealing to the instincts of mothers and for an atmosphere where the young are not encouraged by their families to become warriors, he is also referring to soldiers as sons of a motherland. In this way, he is able to issue a further indictment against the way in which nationalism militates against the real interests of the

²² William Anthony Willibrand, Ernst Toller and his ideology, University of Iowa Humanistic Studies, Vol. 7, No. 412, Iowa, 1945, p. 9.

²³ Ibid., p. 33.

individual as opposed to those of state, and he indicates the possibility of real brotherhood not based on false collectives. It is no coincidence that the representative of this is the mother, the caring figure, as opposed to the father figure, the epitome of betrayal and oppression for the Expressionists. Although in his book on Toller Malcolm Pittock also interprets the mother figure in 'Der Ringende' too literally, he does point out that in 'Marschlied' Toller has already referred to Germany as an unfulfilled mother: 'Wir Preis einer Mutter, / Die nie sich erfüllt'.²⁴

2.3 Early poems related to Die Wandlung

It is clear that much of Toller's early Expressionist poetry relates closely both thematically and textually to his first drama Die Wandlung. In this section those poems will be considered which show exceptionally close correlations with the play, either through the prominence of a Messiah or *Dichter* figure resembling Friedrich or Toller himself, or through direct parallels with specific scenes from the play, or through the attack on the abuse of language which figures so prominently both in Die Wandlung and Masse Mensch. There is no documentary evidence which enables us to establish with certainty whether these poems were initial sketches for the play or whether his poetic production was entirely separate from the writing of his drama.

'Aufrüttelung' will be considered in the version which prefaced the first edition of Die Wandlung. The only difference between this version and that in the estate of Fritz Claus is the adverb 'blinzelnd' in line 10, which replaces 'blitzend' in the Claus version: the latter should be considered an oversight. 'Der Ringende' will be examined in terms of the variants which Toller later publishes, and it will be suggested that the untitled poem from the estate of Fritz Claus is in fact 'Der Entwurzelte', a poem read at a public performance in January 1918. Two poems related to Die Wandlung from the N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv will be discussed, followed by the early published poems 'An die Sprache' and 'Anklag ich Euch', which concern Toller's early political experiences.

²⁴ Pittock, op. cit., p. 152.

2.3.1 'Aufrüttelung', 'Der Ringende' and 'Der Entwurzelte'

Die Wandlung is a play which speaks to a generation which shared common experiences in the period up to and during the First World War. It achieved success because so many of those watching could identify personally with the experiences undergone by the central character Friedrich, and most of Friedrich's experiences had been shared in essence by his creator. As a preface, 'Aufrüttelung' [GW II 9] is intended to fulfil a similar function: by depicting creatively his own personal progression, Toller hoped to strike a chord with his generation. The intention of drawing the reader into the poem is clear from the use of the first person plural.

The poem consists of three stages: it conveys firstly the unreal and abstract preoccupations of the pre-war years, then the traumatic shock of the reality of the war, and finally the hope of a new *Gemeinschaft* to rise from the ruins left by the war, to be created primarily by the *Dichter*. The progression is mirrored in the way in which the poem changes. The strict, formal conventions of the first two stanzas cede to rhythmic free form. As the poem gradually frees itself from its formal bonds, we are invited to look back at the opening with a new perspective, and to realise that the 'Dämmerwelt' was the end of the old world. The piece also functions as an explicit personal statement vis-à-vis Toller's former artistic assumptions.

The poem shows growing mastery of technique. The pivotal stanza is the third: its first line continues the iambic metre of the preceding two stanzas, but the second makes use of trochees to jar the sensibilities of the reader (or listener). The tactic is effective but, to ensure that it was not overlooked, Toller italicised the third stanza. Effective too is the fourth stanza, which describes the unpleasant basis which has literally been overlooked: the first part of the poem suggests observation of things happening above, 'fallen [...] Sonnenstrahlen [...] Von hochgewölbten Toren fielen'. The second section describes what they would have seen, had they looked down - 'auf der Erde [...] Aus Gruben quoll [...] Zu unseren Füßen'. The Messianic *Bruder* of the final section of the poem is to be Friedrich in Die Wandlung.

The subtitle of the play - 'Das Ringen eines Menschen' - suggests a connection with 'Der Ringende'. Other textual references will be adduced to support this, before consideration is given to thematic similarities and the various versions in which Toller published the poem.

In the second stanza of the poem Toller questions his relationship with his mother:

Kann ich nicht jene Frau,
Die mir mit ihrem Blute
In dunklen Nächten Herzschlag lieh,
Aus frommem Herzen Mutter nennen,
So will ich weite Wege wandern,²⁵

There is a clear similarity to the following passage from *Die Wandlung*, where Friedrich criticises his mother:

Mutter nannte ich dich, weil du mich gebarst. Kann ich dich noch heute Mutter heißen, da du meine Seele aussetzest, wie törichte Mütter ihr nacktes Kind? [GW II 19]

For both the subject of the poem and for Friedrich, the central issue against which they rebel is a conception of motherhood endemic to an inward-looking *Gemeinschaft*, which seeks to insulate the individual from society as a whole and from the possibility of complete social integration.

The nature of what the *Mutter* represents becomes clearer when one reads the play. This is also true of the oblique reference in the poem: 'Geschenke wurden Hagelkörner, die mich schlugen'. In the first scene of the play, after his disagreement with his mother, Friedrich looks across the street into the window of the non-Jewish family and says 'nun teilen sie Geschenke aus'. [GW II 19-20] The joy of giving presents at Christmas brings home to Friedrich the embittered and isolated *laager* mentality of his own community. Every present hurts him because it is another instance of his inability to become fully assimilated.

When Friedrich adopts the figure of Ahasver [GW II 28], he comes very close to the sentiments expressed in the second stanza: 'So will ich weite Wege wandern'. His sister comes to him at his nadir, in the poem the death of his old self ('Ich starb [...]'), and points the way for him in the following terms:

SCHWESTER: Dein Weg führt dich hinauf.

FRIEDRICH: Zur Mutter zurück?

SCHWESTER: Höher, doch auch zur Mutter. [GW II 40]

There are two conceptions of motherhood here. One is the limiting conception, which Friedrich and the subject of the poem painfully transcend, and the other is that of the new community or family of mankind. Friedrich thus undergoes the development outlined more elliptically in the poem, from the perception and rejection of illusory states of belonging which operate against the true

²⁵ 'Der Ringende', *Die weißen Blätter*, 6 (1919), pp. 261-262.

Gemeinschaft, symbolised by the initial conception of *Mutter*, to a realisation of his own humanity and by extension therefore that of the community of mankind. The progression in 'Der Ringende' is analogous to that in 'Aufrüttelung' and Die Wandlung, but the latter two contain a slightly different emphasis at the end. 'Der Ringende' is essentially the description of a personal transformation, while 'Aufrüttelung' and Die Wandlung point to the Messianic role of the *Bruder*, who has undergone this transformation, in changing the hearts of others.

The version in which we have been considering the poem up to now is that published in Die weißen Blätter in 1919, but two other versions exist. That in the estate of Fritz Claus merely adds the final line 'Ich ward mir Mutter', which makes more explicit the progression of the poem. This version probably predates that of 1919, as it would not have made sense for Toller to send Claus a handwritten copy of a poem which had already been published. The question is largely immaterial, however, as the versions differ only in this one minor respect.

More interesting is the version which Toller published in Vormorgen in 1924. [AS 47, PBDG 277] It is the first poem of the first section Verse vom Friedhof, and it is dated in the table of contents as 1912. Without wishing to impugn Toller's veracity, there is a strong case against the acceptance of this date. Firstly, the 1912 version shows many Expressionist characteristics - the free form, primal vocabulary and dislocation of language - before Expressionism had become a widely-known movement. Secondly, the techniques and form of the poem relate much more closely to the war poems in the Verse vom Friedhof than to 'Umarmung' or 'Wunder', written before 1915. And finally, there is the question of the poem's close relation to Die Wandlung which, Toller states clearly, was only drafted in 1917. [GW II 8]

The untitled poem from the estate of Fritz Claus, with the first line 'Ich weiss um deine Tränen, Bruder', deals with the search of its subject for healthy roots, here to be understood as social roots. [APP, 'Der Entwurzelte'] The first stanza concerns an unsuccessful attempt by the subject to relate to society in a nationalistic manner. Like Friedrich in Die Wandlung, he seeks his roots in the national *Heimat*. The following lines are slightly problematical in this respect:

Du streckst gedankenmüde Hände
Nach warmer Form voll süssem Duft,
Die Dir ein frohes Lächeln gab.
Du nanntest sie [...]
Ersehnte Heimat.

If we relate these enigmatic lines to Die Wandlung, then we can see a possible explanation. Friedrich's desire for assimilation into society as a whole is connected

with his confused feelings about his relationship with Gabriele. He senses - unjustifiably at the start - that she sees him out of pity, and he looks to proving himself for the fatherland as a way of bringing about an equality in their relationship. But this desire is a result of being 'gedankenmüde', for Friedrich does not think through the human consequences of participating in a war. In his mind his desire for Gabriele ('warme Form') fuses with his desire for full, unconditional acceptance by society - the 'ersehnte Heimat' of the poem.

One other apparent confusion in the poem is the use of the first, second and third persons. The poem may well not be addressed to someone of Toller's acquaintance, or even to some notional other person, but perhaps to the poet himself. This process of poetic self-definition can be found in many early Expressionist poems, including those of Gottfried Benn and August Stramm. In this sense, the poem can be interpreted as the poet reflecting on his own development from a state of illusion to one of self-reliance and on the problem of how the self relates to the wider community or environment. Thus while the first and second person elements define each other, they also do so in relation to the third person, the outside world.

The final two lines of the first stanza also link with Die Wandlung. In the third *Bild* of the play, Friedrich imagines he has been assimilated into the national community by his mere presence in the colonial army. His comrades, however, make it clear to him not only that he will never be fully assimilated, but that they are all in a sense *vaterlandslos*: 'ZWEITER SOLDAT: Und wenn du tausendmal in unseren Reihen kämpfst, darum bleibst du doch der Fremde'. [GW II 24] When Friedrich reaches the lowest point in the process of purgation, his sister comes to him to show him the way, which is through a different perception of himself to a new attitude towards others. Through his bitter experiences, Friedrich comes to knowledge of his own humanity, and he resolves to continue 'Wissend um den Menschen'. [GW II 40] A similar sentiment is to be found in the poem:

Sei Erdreich!

Baum!

Der in Dir wissend Wurzel schlägt.

The subject is enjoined here to perceive the humanity within himself; the next stage is to do as Friedrich does, and to convert others to this perception.

Support for the idea that this poem was written around the time of the composition of Die Wandlung is given by the similarities it shows to 'Der Ringende' and 'Aufrüttelung'. All of the poems turn on the way in which hopes and assumptions expressed at the beginning are dashed or are shown to be hollow,

and all show ways of coming to terms with this through perceiving the strength and *Menschlichkeit* in oneself. The other two poems comment on an earlier creative phase by contrasting a precious poetic opening with powerful Expressionist free form: here, too, Toller alludes to this phase in the line ‘Wohl tönst Du nicht in Farbenharmonien’, a reference to the colour-based poetry and synaesthesia of the time of Impressionism, *Neuromantik* and literary *Jugendstil*.

Another method of dating the poem is as follows. In Der Fall Toller, Frühwald and Spalek refer to a poetry reading given on 25 January 1918 at which, amongst other items, Toller read a poem called ‘Der Entwurzelte’.²⁶ For this, we only have a title and no poem; the poem before us has no title. The emphasis on *Wurzeln* in the poem makes it likely that this is ‘Der Entwurzelte’. If this is so, then the poem can almost certainly be placed around the time of Die Wandlung, because the idea of *Wurzeln* is a recurrent one within the play, as the following passage demonstrates:

FRIEDRICH: Ich bleibe hier und werde doch meinen Weg weiter wandern.
Durch verpestete Straßen und über Mohnfelder, auf sonnigen, schneeigen
Gipfeln und durch Wüsten, wissend, daß ich wurzle in mir. [GW II 57]

The last part of the final line of this quotation is so close to the poem that it makes the idea that they were written at different times seem rather remote.

2.3.2 Poems from Koblenz related to Die Wandlung

In thematic terms the closest Koblenz poem from this section to Die Wandlung is ‘Der Heiland geht durch die Vorstadt’. [APP] Like Friedrich, the saviour figure in the poem embarks upon a journey of experience through the underprivileged areas of society, and through his compassion with their suffering gains the knowledge and will to attempt to redeem them. The adjectives in the first six lines set the mood, ‘welkem [...] dumpfem [...] schweren [...] gedrückten [...] müde’. The women, interestingly, are once more described in terms of their child-bearing role. At the sight of the children, the saviour is already ‘schluchzend’, his pity having been awakened. Yet his initial reaction to their plight is to sing them songs and tell them fairy tales: these may assuage comfortable, well-fed children, but do not address the more fundamental needs of the youngsters before him. Return to the Father is now inconceivable. His assumption into the Godhead is described as ‘in ihn versenken’, a downward motion implying a retrograde step.

²⁶ See note 1.

Instead, 'Trotzig bäumt er seine Seele', suggesting an upwards motion in spiritual terms and, once more, the Expressionist rebellion against the father figure. His pity is useless, it is of relief only to him, and he begins to understand that 'Mitleid' must give way to the Activist *Tat* - as in the later poem 'Mütter', '*Schmerz, gebäre Tat!*'.²⁷ He is now resolved, 'einst wird ers zum Guten lenken'. The poem is ambitious but unfortunately falls short in several respects. Apart from the maintenance of the rhyme, there is little metrical or rhythmic consistency, resulting in a mixture of discipline and free form. The passage on the plight of the children overbalances heavily from pathos to sentimentality. The line containing 'Blutgefackeln' is so mixed in its ideas that this neologism loses its effect.

Nonetheless it stands in the mainstream of Expressionist poetry. We have here the redeeming figure, similar to Hasenclever's 'Der politische Dichter' or the subject of Rubiner's 'Der Mensch'. The vocabulary and imagery are redolent of Expressionism, 'Trotzig bäumt er seine Seele' and 'Seine Worte glühen Blutgefackeln in der Luft'. Stylistically then this is not a very early poem, and if it is to be assumed that Toller must have had experience of the poorer quarters of a large city before writing the poem, then the likely setting would be Heidelberg or Munich. Support for Heidelberg is given by his fellow student of the time Margarete Turnowsky-Pinner. In an essay on the period she quotes in her own English translation a note which he left her one Sunday:

On Sunday afternoon the streets are so sad when the poor show off their holiday, that miserable, sore, mutilated holiday brightened up a little by the glaring coloured cinema posters and gaudy coffee-house splendour. When I walk through the streets on a Sunday afternoon, I am helpless, like a child who cannot understand why the flowers in the vase wilt and turn ugly.²⁸

The distress at the plight of working class people is coupled with incomprehension as to the cause, as in the poem. The political naïveté of the poem would also place it before Toller's period in military prison in 1917, at which time he claims to have attained a deeper political understanding. In this poem there is no mention of blame attaching to the owners of the factories which maintain the poverty. Toller describes instead an existential misery, ordained - or at the very least tolerated - by God.

Not for the first time, Toller harnesses Christian ideas in his poetry. The saviour is seen gathering the little children around him; he feels at the end as

²⁷ Rubiner, op. cit., pp. 64-65.

²⁸ Quoted in Turnowsky-Pinner, op. cit., p. 218.

though he is rising again from a 'verwester Gruft', in other words Christian ideas are in a state of decline, a new morality is needed based on the recognition of social distress and the will to alleviate it. The poem makes clear the difference between Toller's conception of the saviour and the Christian redeemer. The rebirth of this saviour comes from the rejection of the easy option of elevation back to the Godhead. His anger stems from his perception of the poor as being ignored by God; he sees that immediate temporal action is necessary, that it is unfair to ask these people to delay their gratification to the hereafter. Christian teaching of the deferral of salvation from the temporal to the spiritual now reveals itself to him as 'Hohn'. While touching on some of the ideas of the later prison poem 'Unser Weg', this poem does not put the blame on the human management of society.

The question of divine responsibility for the state of the world preoccupied Toller in his childhood and early youth. In Eine Jugend in Deutschland, he relates his mother's reply to the question of why there are rich and poor: 'Weil der liebe Gott es so will'. [GW IV 17] His resultant confusion is compounded by the cook's reply to his demand to know why a house in the town burned down, 'Weil Gott strafen will'. [GW IV 17] He has been told not to touch a long glass tube in his room by the maid, who substantiates this by saying 'Da wohnt der Juden ihr Gott drin'. [GW IV 18] In fear and anger, he breaks the tube and then feels happy and relieved 'daß ich den >lieben Gott< totgeschlagen habe'. [GW IV 19] Toller found it hard to understand the wrathful God of the Old Testament, and this poem in part tries to resolve his difficulties by rewriting part of the New Testament.

'Studentinnen' is also closely allied to Die Wandlung. [APP] In the eleventh *Bild*, when Friedrich has made his first address to the crowd, a young female student approaches him to tell him of her desire for him in the following terms:

STUDENTIN: [...] Aber du -- dich liebe ich ... Dir will ich mich bringen, umarme mich. Nimm ... meine heißen Brüste ... Mein Schoß stöhnt ... Ich sehne mich nach deinen Umarmungen ... Gib mir ein Kind ... [GW II 51-52]

The parallels are beyond question, but the poem contains considerably more than the intervention of the rather shallow character in the play.

The poem is connected more interestingly with Friedrich's oration in the final *Bild*. He addresses various sections of society in order to demonstrate how they have lost their *Menschlichkeit*, and he addresses girls and women thus:

Ich weiß um dich, du Mädchen, um deine wünscheheißen Nächte [...] Ich kenne dich Frau, fruchtbeladner Baum, den keiner kommt zu stützen, und

der bricht und dorrt ob seiner Fülle [...] Für die Gebärerinnen und ihre Kinder baut ihr raffinierte Pranger [...] [GW II 58-59]

We find here the adjective *fruchtbeladen* from 'Studentinnen', but also echoes from other, earlier poems. The 'wünscheheißen Nächte' of the girls is reminiscent of the 'frühlingsjungen Weibern / mit sehnenden Blicken und schämigen Leibern' in 'Ich suche Dich'. The idea of a woman wasting away in her unfulfilled procreative potential is also the central idea of 'Die Häßliche'.

The parallels are not mere textual resemblances, either, for the poem demonstrates that Toller's view of women and their role changed little during the war and his political activities directly afterward. The poem describes, in a sense, two periods of gestation: to begin with, the female students are 'mit Wünschen schwanger'; the act of love releases them from this state, but only into pregnancy itself. The 'Lust' felt by the female students is connected exclusively with child-bearing. It is interesting that Toller never describes male desire in terms of its reproductive function: it is always an aesthetic or emotional experience, lived out at a higher level than the purely instinctual experience of women. As in the later poem 'Schwangeres Mädchen auf dem Gefängnishof', Toller celebrates unselfconsciously the procreative destiny of women, seemingly ignoring or perhaps even at this time not yet conscious of the role which this ascribes to women in society. They are to be redeemed 'vom dunklen Schmerzenspranger' of childlessness, a state unnatural to them. Paradoxically, pregnancy will make them 'frei'. In all of this, they have no real choice, because the urge comes from 'Das tiefste Blut'.

The mass typification of whole sections of society, of which this is an example, finds full expression in the third *Bild* of *Masse Mensch*, when the Frau speaks and responds to various social groups. This technique would eventually find its way into the *Sprechchöre* and the *Massenfestspiele*, in which Toller was active.²⁹ The technique in *Die Wandlung* is rather different: Friedrich interacts with individuals, but they are nonetheless typical representatives of various social groups. Less frequently in his poetry does Toller take the case of an individual in order to draw more general conclusions about it. It is more straightforward to deal in generalities, and this may suggest a certain mechanistic dimension to his

²⁹ Toller wrote the *Chorwerk Tag des Proletariats* in prison in 1920, and was particularly prominent in the Leipzig *Massenfestspiele* of 1924. See Wilfried van der Will and Rob Burns, *Arbeiterkulturbewegung in der Weimarer Republik*, Frankfurt am Main, 1982, pp. 167-232.

understanding of society and politics. Hinkemann demonstrates his awareness of this, and is an attempt to establish a balance.

'Studentinnen' represents in Toller's work the meeting point between two poetic trends. It still contains much of the imagery of the earlier poetry ('Erfüllung [...] fruchtbeladnen'), but it now evinces ideas consonant with Expressionism, such as the 'ekstatisch Schrei' and the plea 'Erlöset uns'. The mixture of styles upholds the contention that it was written during his second period at university, in Munich or in Heidelberg, after his active participation in the war. Hence, also, its relation to Die Wandlung, as many of the surviving poems of this period have thematic and often textual correlates in the play.

2.3.3 'An die Sprache' and 'Anklag ich Euch'

Both of these poems are concerned with Toller's reactions to experiences undergone at the start of his political career which were to form the themes in Die Wandlung and Masse Mensch. The poems are similar in tone, both declamatory, both dealing with the abuse of language in politics.

'An die Sprache' [APP] was published in 1918, and while its criticism of the abuse of language was still fully valid at that time, the events which initially inspired it occurred some considerable time earlier.³⁰ In Eine Jugend in Deutschland, Toller gives his account of the founding of the *Kulturpolitischer Bund der Jugend in Deutschland* by a group of students at Heidelberg in November 1917. The ideas of the group were based on an ethical response to the horror of the war and on the hope for a new age to arise from the slaughter. There is no indication of any substantial political activity, but the *Bund* was nonetheless suppressed by the police and by the university authorities. There may be some exaggeration in Toller's account of the extent of its influence and subsequent suppression, but it was attacked in the *Berliner Tageblatt* as being 'würdelos' and 'nicht vaterländisch'. The *Bund* replied in the same paper, arguing that it was patriotic in a more fundamental sense and that, if its acts were interpreted in the original negative manner, 'Dann hat unsere deutsche Sprache ihren Sinn verloren'. [GW IV 83] This biographical link, combined with the early Expressionist style of the poem, place its origin firmly at this time.

Except for the title, there are no definite or indefinite articles, giving the following disjunction to the language characteristic of early Expressionism: 'Tauch

³⁰ 'An die Sprache', Die Aktion, 8 (1918), p. 297.

in geheiligten Quell geäderte Glieder / Voll göttlichen Bluts!'. The poem displays the faith in the word which was a central tenet of Activism. The word is here expressly connected with Geist, the second element of the Activist trinity *Wort, Geist* and *Tat*. Toller's experience of the Munich Councils Republic altered significantly the role he sees here for language and *Geist* and, as Lamb has pointed out, both during and after his time in prison he went to some lengths to distance himself from the more heady aspirations of Activism.³¹

The theme of the poem is the betrayal of language. A potentially clear medium of expression has been relativised and twisted to inglorious ends. This is probably an attack on war propaganda ('In allen Pfützen Europas'), but it might also conceivably include the abuse of language by the revolutionary dilettantes described in 'Anklag ich Euch'. Toller calls on language to take revenge on those who have compromised its positive potential, but it is here that a certain lack of clarity begins. He makes it clear neither on whom language is to revenge itself, nor how it is to do it. And there is another confusion inherent in the very anthropomorphosis of language. To apostrophise language Toller is obliged to elevate it into an autonomous entity, yet he criticises its misuse at the hands of others. Thus he implies that language only gains a value, be it positive or negative, at the hands of its users. This unresolved ambiguity is a logical fault which undermines the argument and topos of the poem. Another slight weakness is apparent in the second stanza. Toller refers here both to the Classical Medusa ('Gorgonenantlitz') and to the old Germanic legend of the *Gesundbrunnen*, which rejuvenates those who use it. The ideas work individually, but their proximity in the poem detracts from their effect.

The idea of degradation (*Schändung*) is here restricted to that of language. The connection between the abuse of language and that of the *Mensch* is made in 'Anklag ich Euch', and also in *Die Wandlung*. In his despair in the seventh *Bild*, Friedrich cries: 'Geschändete Sprache! Geschändete Menschen! [...] Um des Vaterlands willen [...]'. [GW II 39] Degradation both of language and of people forms a central part of the critique of *Unmenschlichkeit* in the war poetry, and this will be discussed in due course.

³¹ Stephen Lamb, 'Ernst Toller and the Weimar Republic', in *Culture and society in the Weimar Republic*, ed. by Keith Bullivant, Manchester, 1977, pp. 71-93. Lamb points to Toller's reproof of Kurt Hiller's intellectual elitism in the *Briefe aus dem Gefängnis* [GW V 166], and his reference to the inadequacy of *Geist* alone in 'Deutsche Revolution' [GW I 159-165].

In a letter to Das Tribunal accompanying the first publication of 'Anklag ich Euch' [APP], Toller states that it was written in 1918, but the events and the personalities to which it refers remain unclear.³² Despite the lack of clear biographical background, the poem might well refer to events surrounding the Munich munitions workers' strike of January/February 1918. As a result *inter alia* of his activities in this strike Toller was placed under military arrest, and he may have felt his punishment to be unjust while other less committed instigators escaped retribution.

His experience of the demagogues who helped to arouse the munitions workers and then deserted them was so deep that it was incorporated into the figure of the Kommis des Tages in Die Wandlung and of Der Namenlose in Masse Mensch. The former provides the link between the poem and Die Wandlung, especially if we compare his language in the eleventh *Bild* with that of the poem:

O, ich sehe euch, alle aufgespeicherten Kräfte frei, grandiose Bilder des Kampfes. Männer die Fahne der Freiheit schwingen! Frauen euch umfassen in heißer Umarmung! Massen wogen! Schüsse fallen! Verse und Pamphlete will ich euch dazu schreiben, die blutige Taten sind. Meine Zeitschriften sollen euch begleiten mit schmetternden Trompetenklängen! Blut fließt! Blut der Freiheit! Ich sage: Marschieret, marschieret! [GW II 49]

The essence of the poem is all here: the literary dilettantes of revolution, who cynically arouse others with calculated phrases, but who then stand back from the physical battle which they have helped provoke.

There are two main butts of Toller's attack here. One is the abuse of language, the use of the word divorced from its practical human consequences, the principal theme of 'An die Sprache'. The word is of no intrinsic value, he seems to be saying, unless it is allied to deeds and personal commitment. Toller's Activist inclinations come across clearly here. Secondly, he attacks the inherent inhumanity of revolutionary intellectuals and tacticians. In the poem, *Mensch* is juxtaposed with *Material*, human beings are seen as mere revolutionary raw material. This view of humanity does not differ essentially from that of the capitalist ('den Herrn'). For the latter, the (non-bourgeois) individual is little more than the labour which he or she adds to the raw materials in order to make a product. For the revolutionary dilettante, the individual is one of the elements of power in the game of revolution and an object on which to test powers of persuasion and oratory. In both attitudes, the *Mensch* is an object rather than an

³² 'Anklag ich Euch', Das Tribunal, 1 (1919), p. 113.

individual human being. This forms part of Toller's critique of war, and in particular of the *Materialschlacht*, in which human beings are accounted as expendable in battle as machinery.

As time passed, Toller may have felt that the poem took too long to make its points. He subsequently shortened it under the title 'An die Dichter' in two different forms, a shorter version in *Vormorgen* [AS 58] and a slightly longer one [APP] in the *Kunstblatt* in the same year.³³ The table of contents of *Vormorgen* gives the date of composition as 1917: this contradicts the date 1918 in the letter to *Das Tribunal*, but as it was published simultaneously the letter must be taken as giving the authoritative date.

2.4 Toller's development from the early poetry to *Die Wandlung*

This chapter has demonstrated how Toller consciously immersed himself in the poetry of early Expressionism, eschewing for the most part the derivative tendencies of his earliest poetry. He even documented this in poems which comment implicitly on his earlier works. The move eventually achieved some success for the aspiring writer, with publication in Expressionist periodicals and the inclusion of some poems in Rubiner's *Kameraden der Menschheit*. The freedom of form, the experimental approach to syntax and the epic proportions of the movement were inherently attractive to a poet who had begun to wean himself off the more aesthetic models of literary Impressionism, *Neuromantik* and literary *Jugendstil*. But equally this appeared to Toller as the most appropriate vehicle for the themes which preoccupied him: the problem of belonging, his feelings about his own upbringing, the horror of war, the injustice of society and the atmosphere of *Aufbruch* and regeneration.

Although there is some record of Toller's having written some short sketches at this stage, there is no doubt that he saw himself primarily as a poet. The ideas of Expressionism helped him to fuse his poetic drives and his desire for political involvement through the paradigm of the wise, politically engaged *Dichter*. The point of contact between his poetry and his politics is his power of political oratory. Initially Toller was not aware of how he could best contribute to political events, as he writes in his autobiography: 'ich möchte helfen, irgend etwas tun, ich verteile [...] Verse'. [GW IV 88] When the striking munitions workers meet to choose delegations to protest to the Chief of Police about the summary arrest and

³³ 'An die Dichter', *Kunstblatt*, 8 (1924), p. 332.

imprisonment of Kurt Eisner and amongst others Sonja Lerch, the model for the Frau in Masse Mensch, Toller steps forward:

Da melde ich mich, der Vorsitzende bittet mich, einige Worte zu sprechen,
zum ersten Mal rede ich in einer Massenversammlung. Die ersten Sätze
stottere ich, verlegen und unbeholfen, dann spreche ich frei und gelöst und
weiß selbst nicht, woher die Kraft meiner Rede rührt. [GW IV 90]

From this point onwards, Toller was to become a highly regarded political orator. The political speech gave an outlet for his lyrical tendencies but, unlike articles or pamphlets, it was not subject to detailed textual or critical scrutiny, relying instead on its capacity to move and on its instant effect on its audience - in short, everything Toller could expect from Expressionist poetry.

From its beginning as the medium he chose to articulate his concerns, Expressionist verse became the language through which he articulated his political ideas and thus it also conditioned his actions and his reactions to events. Activities such as giving speeches and distributing poems like 'Legende' were the product of his belief in the supremacy of *Geist* and the inevitability of social collapse and regeneration. His views were very optimistic regarding the rate at which social change on the scale he envisaged could be achieved. During the three months in military prison after arrest for his activities in the munitions strikes Toller caught up on his socialist reading and added a more analytical dimension to his sense of social justice.

He then began to channel his creative abilities into the dramas Die Wandlung and Masse Mensch, exploring through drama his political involvement and the problems this posed him. The dense Expressionist lyricism of these two dramas almost tempts one to regard them as extended poems. During his time in military prison in 1918 and in the first two years of his five-year *Festungshaft* beginning in 1919, Toller used his poetry to examine the experience of prison. For this he turned to an established form, the sonnet, and this change in poetic direction will be considered in the next chapter.

Before that, one final point remains to be emphasised. Given the lack of critical attention paid to areas of Toller's life and work other than his early dramas, one could easily form the impression that his creative abilities burst into life in 1919 with the publication and performance of Die Wandlung. These last two chapters demonstrate not just that his first play was a culmination of a significant period of poetic activity, but that this period was predated by and indeed to a certain extent predicated on a previous phase of verse writing. It will be seen that the sonnet period and the mature Expressionist period were consciously adopted

literary styles, each suited to the articulation of specific themes and experiences.

Chapter 3

The sonnets: a return to form (1919-1921)

If the period in which Toller was poetically productive was circumscribed, then this is even more true of his time as a writer of sonnets between 1918 and 1921. Certainly he had written an occasional sonnet before his period in military prison in 1918 such as 'Umarmung', discussed in Chapter 1, but the influences which pervade this poem place it clearly amongst his earliest poems. The texture and themes both of the 'lakeside sonnets' ('Abend am Bodensee' and 'Abend am Welssee') and of the prison sonnets (the Gedichte der Gefangenen) demonstrate increasing originality and show Toller as the master of the form rather than as its pupil. These two groups of sonnets will be considered in turn in this chapter.

Until this point, Toller had been experimenting with ever more ambitious and extended Expressionist poems. The change in style to the writing exclusively of conventional sonnets is so abrupt that it can only have stemmed from a clear decision, yet no explanation of this decision is provided in any of Toller's surviving works. His experiences of prison in 1918 and from 1919 onwards formed a stark contrast to the open and rapidly changing life he had experienced outside. Within the disciplined framework of prison life, Toller was obliged also to discipline his emotions and reactions. Given then that he viewed himself in artistic terms at this time primarily as a poet, he required a set of conventions which would allow him to express his experiences in verse without losing self-control. The sonnet form provided the medium whereby he could articulate his prison experience in a coherent and structured manner which would have been readily comprehensible to his audience. We return here to a central axiom regarding Toller's poetry, that at any given stage he adopts the form and style most appropriate to the themes he is seeking to articulate.

The larger-scale early Expressionist poems were now beginning to find alternative use in his dramatic writing, as he began to write scenes from what was to become Die Wandlung, both in military prison and earlier during the munitions workers' strikes. While this may have satisfied Toller's desire to tackle grander themes, it was inadequate to convey the minutiae of prison experience which began to form the core of his life, and in this respect the sonnet was ideal. It was short, took often a single experience as its starting point and provided a progression from the relating of a specific instance to the addressing of a generality. It is tempting even to see the adoption of the sonnet as a metaphor for incarceration: within a rigid, even restrictive framework, the poet retains the capacity for self-expression, without losing an emotional intensity which is perforce limited in scope, and to this extent form and

content act in unison. The adoption of a framework in which he could safely articulate his prison experiences can also be seen in Justiz-Erlebnisse (1927).¹

The brevity of the phase during which Toller wrote sonnets suggests of itself not only that they suited a specific purpose but that the motivation for writing in this form had either ceased or was being fulfilled in some other manner after the publication of the Gedichte der Gefangenen in 1921. The truth of the matter probably embraces both possibilities. The discipline of the sonnet form was a necessary medium to express his problems of adjustment to the brutality and arbitrariness of life for left-wing inmates of Bavarian prisons during the Weimar Republic. However, a reading both of the Gedichte der Gefangenen and of Eine Jugend in Deutschland suggests that Toller began from 1921 onwards to come to terms with his experience. This was not a smooth transition, and was punctuated by bouts of rage and deep depression, and it could indeed be argued that this was only an apparent reconciliation with his quotidian realities achieved at the cost of a flight into self-absorption. Nonetheless inmate number 44, as Toller styled himself, was much calmer and more philosophical towards the end of his *Festungshaft*.

The other possibility, which is consistent with this, is that his experience of prison came to expression in a different form. Early Expressionist poetry would have been a kind of Pandora's Box for the release of Toller's emotions concerning his incarceration and thus, in order to preserve his spiritual equilibrium, this style was to be avoided. The reassuring inflexibility of the sonnet form provided the framework within which his feelings could safely be articulated. Once the initial horror of incarceration and the atmosphere of terror following the fall of the Councils Republic began to recede, Toller proceeded to write Das Schwalbenbuch, a thoroughly Expressionist response to the shock he felt at the death of his friend and fellow-inmate August Hagemeister. This episode is inherently no less shocking or frightening than

¹ That Toller needed an unambiguous framework within which to express his experiences of prison is supported by the format of Justiz-Erlebnisse, Berlin, 1927 (reprinted in Berlin, 1979), his account of injustice in the Bavarian prison system and during the suppression of the Councils Republic in 1919. Here he borrows the statistical and documentary style pioneered by the Heidelberg statistician Emil Julius Gumbel in his seminal work on political justice in the early Weimar Republic, Vier Jahre politischer Mord (Berlin-Fichtenau, 1922). Toller must have been aware that a purely personal account would have been too overwhelming and would have descended into an undisciplined diatribe without a clear structure and methodology, and similarly in his poetic work it is this external discipline which Toller required from the sonnet.

any of his own experiences at the start of his sentence, such as the exposure to trigger-happy warders bent on shooting prisoners they had provoked into actions which they could describe as attempts to escape. Yet the emotional force of his response to Hagemeister's death finds clear and unsentimental expression in the much freer form and diction of Das Schwalbenbuch. This is an important benchmark in Toller's progress towards a synthesis of experience and its articulation.

From 1918 we can see in Toller's work two distinct tendencies, which we might call the lyrical and formal. Between 1918 and 1921 his lyrical and less obviously structured tendencies are evident in the language of his dramas Die Wandlung and Masse Mensch. At the same time his need for a kind of formal security can be seen in his poetry through his adoption of the sonnet form. However from 1922 to 1924 this situation is reversed: the language of his dramas Hinkemann, Die Maschinenstürmer and Der entfesselte Wotan becomes in varying degrees more realistic while the less formally structured lyricism reappears in Das Schwalbenbuch and in the verse collection Vormorgen.

The start of Toller's sonnet phase is significant in that it marks the beginning of the diversification of his writing. Until this time, Toller had viewed himself as a poet *pur sang*, but the growing range of his poetic expression brought about a broadening of the genres in which he worked. His fascination with the scope and expressive capacity of early Expressionism led him to attempt an even grander scale through his Expressionist dramas Die Wandlung and Masse Mensch. Another part of him nonetheless wanted to retain an interest in smaller-scale verse writing and resorted to one of its most conventional forms, the sonnet. Thus poet and writer began to coexist, not as separate entities, but with his poetic drives informing and shaping his work in other genres. The underlying lyricism of his work in other genres has its root in his decision at this point to handle wider social themes in dramatic form, written for the most part in a form of Expressionist verse, and to treat personal themes in sonnets. It is the adoption of this latter form which provides Toller with the long-term discipline necessary to return successfully to the writing of Expressionist verse in 1923 and 1924. Towards the end of his time in the prison of Niederschönenfeld we see him fusing the lyrical and formal drives and producing his most accomplished poetry. In particular the Lieder der Gefangenen from Vormorgen are an implied comment on Toller's move to sonnets, because for the most part they are abridged versions of the original prison sonnets, suggesting that he no longer found this form the most suitable for that which he wanted to express about prison life.

3.1 The 'lakeside' sonnets

'Abend am Bodensee' and 'Abend am Welssee' are sonnets which clearly were composed in conjunction with each other. Both poems are set at evening time by the lakeside, and while describing beautiful landscapes nonetheless contain echoes of the less happy experiences Toller underwent. It is impossible to establish whether these are merely two examples of a more extended collection of such poems, so it will be assumed that they were composed as a thematic pair. It is also difficult to establish broad periods of likely composition, but it will be suggested on the basis of certain references and of the maturity of style that they were written in the period 1917-1919.

The style and literary influences of 'Abend am Bodensee' [APP] look back to the time of 'Umarmung', but the mastery of these aspects looks forward to the sonnet cycle Gedichte der Gefangenen.² It may be possible to date the poem by reference to biographical details. In August and September 1917 Toller stayed at a sanatorium in Bad Schachen on Lake Constance in order to convalesce from the rigours of the war. It is likely that 'Abend am Bodensee' was either written or conceived here.

It contains elements of Impressionism, *Neuromantik* and literary *Jugendstil*, which are of particular note because when these elements have occurred in his early Expressionist poetry Toller has used irony to distance himself from the comfortable assumptions about the world which these pre-war styles implied. Yet here we have the *Naturverbundenheit*, synaesthesia and emphasis on colour of *Neuromantik* and literary *Jugendstil*, as well as the evocation of momentary mood normally associated with Impressionism. Toller introduces these characteristics with a much surer touch than in 'Umarmung': after rejecting them in the hectic early phase of Expressionism, a more contemplative Toller is making his peace with them, assimilating rather than denouncing the early phase of his poetic development, and the fruits of this will be seen in the Gedichte der Gefangenen.

However, Toller does not merely revert to the aestheticism of his early phase. The mention of the smoky factories and of the dead *Brüder* introduces a political or critical element into the poem. These 'dark Satanic mills' stand in stark contrast to the description of the beautiful natural surroundings, but the precise nature of this reference is unclear. It could refer to the war, the smoke turning Toller's thoughts to the ever-present palls of smoke from artillery bombardments. In 'Soldaten' Toller even likens war to a factory: 'Ich kann die Gesichter meiner Kameraden nicht

² 'Abend am Bodensee', Die Bücherkiste, 1 (1919/20), H. 5/6/7, p. 66.

vergessen. / Sie ließen sich in Fabriken führen und zu Maschinenteilen pressen'.³ This is a likely interpretation, as 'Soldaten' appears in the same issue of Die Bücherkiste. It could also refer to the experience of prison, as in the later prison sonnet 'Fabrikschornsteine am Vormorgen', or to the constant grinding of the exploitative capitalist process, or even to comrades who had fallen during political struggles such as the munitions workers' strikes of 1918. Whatever the exact reference, it brings a hard edge to the poem, and it shows that Toller has not only mastered the style, he has also learnt to make it do his political bidding. The poem would seem to redress the imbalance of the aestheticism and apoliticism of his earliest poetry.

More problematical in this respect amongst others is 'Abend am Welssee'. [APP] We find here many of the elements of the early poetry: frequent use of colour, the lexis of literary *Jugendstil*, the synaesthesia in 'Quirlt Jubelschrei wie glühend roter Mohn'. The figure of the young boy represents man in his natural state, and as such he blends in seamlessly with the natural surroundings, man and nature in harmony. The scene is almost pre-industrial, suggesting a time when man was at one with his environment, before the rapacity and destructiveness of capitalism destroyed that delicate balance. The insertion of the figure of the young boy also suggests that we may derive hope from a new generation which, after the carnage of the war and its shattering effect on the old social order, has the opportunity to reassert a more natural order. This interpretation is supported by the link between the boy's cry of joy and the bright red poppies. This would then place the poem after Toller's participation in the war and the start of his involvement in politics.

While the stylistic elements look back to Toller's very early poetry, there is a sureness of touch and a consistency which the early poems lack. The imagery is coherent and often effective and the description of the fauna in the first two lines of the third strophe is genuinely humorous. 'Abend am Welssee' demonstrates how effectively Toller was able to combine the early influences on his poetry with the greater skill he had developed.

The title, too, may help us to place this amongst the later poetry. It could refer to some small lake which Toller frequented as a youngster but, given the similarity of the title to that of the previous poem, it seems probable that it was written at a similar time. If the lake in the title is near the Austrian town of Wels, south-west of Linz, then it might have been written at any time during the period 1917-1919, or even after, although this is unlikely given the dearth of poetic

³ 'Soldaten', Die Bücherkiste, 1 (1919/20), H. 5/6/7, p. 70.

production after Toller's release from prison. Some factors speak in favour of the town of Wels: it has a large grain market, which would make sense of the mention of 'Ähren'; and it has a hydroelectric generating station, which often requires a dammed lake. It is possible that Toller could have made a journey into Austria of which there is no biographical record.

The end of the second strophe introduces an element of sadness and the hint of death into the idyllic landscape, as we have also seen happen in 'Abend am Bodensee'. The references to the bells and to 'ferner Schuß' could relate either to the war or to Toller's political involvements in Munich. The inability to forget the war even in beautiful surroundings can be seen in the war poem 'Konzert' and in a passage from Eine Jugend in Deutschland in which Toller, whilst enjoying the splendours of the English Garden in Munich, finds himself overcome by memories of the war. There is a recuperative, even escapist dimension to the poem which would accord with this phenomenon. After this change of mood, though, the observer is jolted back to reality by the humorous description of 'der Frösche Zanken', suggesting that Toller is on the road to overcoming his experiences of the war. This lends weight to the stylistic argument for placing the poem some way into his career as a poet.

These two poems show Toller coming full circle from his earliest poetry, applying the poetic lessons of the previous years and moulding them to suit what he wants to express. The fact that he uses earlier techniques without any hint of irony or criticism suggests that he did not need to react to or justify his past efforts and that he was confident in the level of expertise he had achieved. This confidence was to find clear expression in the prison sonnets.

3.2 The Gedichte der Gefangenen

The Gedichte der Gefangenen, published in 1921 and in a second edition with a long introductory poem in 1923, were written to convey the extremes of Toller's experience of prison. Amongst the prefatory notes to the collection, he recounts an impressive list of the prisons he had resided in as a result initially of his activities in the munitions workers' strikes in 1918, for which he spent several months in a military detention centre in the Leonrodstraße in Munich, and of his participation in the Councils Republic in 1919, for which he served five years' *Festungshaft*, principally in Niederschönenfeld. Twelve of the twenty-one poems were published for the first time in this collection in 1921, six were published before and three in the

same year in periodicals such as Die weißen Blätter and Expressionist collections such as Verkündigung.

After his capture in June 1919 following the fall of the Councils Republic Toller was quite justifiably in mortal fear, but as events calmed so a welcome - even beneficial - tranquillity descended on him. The poems reflect the vicissitudes of his experience, and therefore vary enormously in theme and emotional tenor. Some evince the frustration and outrage of his later reflections on the injustices of the time, Justiz-Erlebnisse; others recognise the part which isolation and freedom from commitments played in creating the atmosphere necessary for the writing of the poems and dramas which created his distinctive reputation as the definitive imprisoned political artist of his time.

As far as can be ascertained, there is no clear structural intent to the Gedichte der Gefangenen. Poems do not occur in discrete thematic groups, nor is there any reason to suggest that they follow any kind of chronological order. For the purposes of this thesis, they have been gathered under broad thematic headings: the adjustment to prison conditions, the retreat into inner life, coming to terms with death, viewing outside life from the inside, the separation from women and preparation for release. The composition of the collection reflects the idea that these themes were recurrent issues for the prisoner - for example, that despair and death were ever-present possibilities that could break through even in the most apparently calm period. To this extent our thematic grouping does not reflect the vagaries of prison life which Toller is seeking to convey. What this division does, however, is to make the overall themes of the collection clearer and to describe a broad process of habituation to prison life. This process is certainly not linear, as any reading of the emotional extremes of the Briefe aus dem Gefängnis demonstrates, and was subject to periodic regressions dependent largely on the hostility of the prison management at any given time. Nonetheless, this adjustment is clearly discernible.

Toller described his intentions in writing the Gedichte der Gefangenen in a letter to Romain Rolland in 1921:

Die Verse der Gefangenen, die ich Ihnen heute schicke - möchten mehr als Verse sein, Briefe, Ruf und Aufruf an Menschen, die sich verantwortlich fühlen und die vorbeigehen an vergitterten Häusern ihrer Städte, ohne zu ahnen, ohne zu erfassen, welche Schuld sie auf sich laden durch ihre Gleichgiltigkeit. [GW V 76]

More than this, Toller has a particular target audience in mind:

Zu den Künftigen, den Jungen, denen, die an die heilende Kraft der Menschlichkeit glauben, denen die Menschlichkeit eine Realität ist, höher als alle Realität der Tagespolitiker, denen, die selbst Bedrückung fühlten und

die wollen, daß alle Bedrückung aufhöre, zu denen werden die Verse sprechen. Und wenn sie nur ein Samenkorn für spätere Taten sind, so haben sie getan, was Kunst kann. [GW V 76]

Toller clearly hopes that the Gedichte der Gefangenen will change hearts and minds, if not immediately. He expects it to strike a chord with those already sympathetically disposed, but his other target population is the young, whose idealism he seeks to preserve. It is an admission that the youth of his generation has failed in its political project, as well as a rather plaintive hope that somehow this idealism can still fulfil itself despite the circumstances. The appeal is ethical and humanitarian rather than overtly political, and this is reflected even in those sonnets which seem political in tone.

In the same letter he addresses the problem of poetic form: 'Die Wurzel jedes Gedichts ist Erlebnis. Was wir Form nennen, ist Liebe.' [GW V 77] He is still struggling for a synthesis of 'Erlebnis', the stimulus for a poem, and 'Form', which he equates with love. The latter is what is necessary to give shape to experiences so that they can be shared with others, the 'Gestaltungskampf' [GW V 59], 'die Kraft, sinnliche Eindrücke leidenschaftlich wiederzuempfinden' [GW V 66]. This is quite a way both from his early poetry, which was 'Form' without 'Erlebnis', and his early Expressionist poetry which was declamatory, which did not seek (with some exceptions such as 'Sämann-Soldat') to establish the bond between poet and reader. In the sonnets Toller often tries to effect complicity with the reader by addressing the persona as 'Du'. This complicity is a characteristic more of the later poems in the Gedichte der Gefangenen, and this is supported by the placing of this undated letter to Romain Rolland between August and September 1921 - as long as Toller's dating is correct.

The choice of the sonnet form was an appropriate one in several ways. It is an excellent vehicle for the poetic exploitation of individual and in themselves relatively limited observations, descriptions and reflections. The successful use of this form demonstrates that Toller had reached a new level of poetic accomplishment, namely the ability to use individual observations as metaphors or as starting points for more abstract contemplations. But the sonnet form also represented a challenge to Toller, which he had tried to meet with little success during his schooldays. The challenge of formal mastery was largely in abeyance during the war and his political activities afterwards. Life was too hectic, new and compelling ideas broke the bounds of the sonnet's form, the freedom and apparent scale of Expressionism was too inviting. It is tempting to see the Gedichte der Gefangenen as a kind of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung*, a consistent demonstration of mastery underlined by the

occasional - and much more successful - use of poetic ideas and influences associated with his early youthful attempts. In a similar way, the revision of these poems in the Lieder der Gefangenen could be seen as a conscious demonstration of mastery over form and expression. The scale of his late Expressionist revisions of the Gedichte der Gefangenen sonnets is considerably less grandiose and more tightly controlled, moving with ease from the particular to the general. There is little sign - if any - of the long-winded and vague generalities of his early Expressionist works.

The Gedichte der Gefangenen show us too a portrait of a man coming to terms with the privations of prison life, of an attempt to retain a relationship with the outside world despite the yawning disparity between his external renown and the arbitrary vicissitudes of life as one prisoner amongst hundreds of others exposed to the petty whims of their gaolers. They represent a huge triumph of will over circumstances, and to this extent can be seen not only as summative but also in a therapeutic sense as formative.

In this way, what was true of the early Expressionist poetry with relation to defining the terms of his perceptions is also true of the prison sonnets: in a situation where he desperately needed the discipline of structure in order to avoid the chaos into which he saw fellow-prisoners sink, Toller adopts one of the most clearly defined poetic structures, which in its turn dictated the scale of the observations they contained. The poems are like small islands of solace in his prison experience, crystallisations of ideas and insights which occurred to him, and because they were individually so limited and of such a different style, they did not interrupt the flow of inspiration for his dramas. The form of the sonnet becomes in itself a metaphor for the confines of prison life.

The following consideration of the themes of this collection will demonstrate that the question of the poetic formulation of Toller's ideas was not merely a matter of aesthetics. The sonnet form was the disciplined framework necessary for him to articulate the extremes of prison experience, and the process of articulation itself in the secluded circumstances in which he was working enabled him to come to terms with these aspects of his experience.

3.2.1 Adjustment to prison conditions

The fullest account of the atmosphere of terror which prevailed after the fall of the Councils Republic in early May 1919 is to be found in Toller's own account of the political justice of the period Justiz-Erlebnisse. He describes trigger-happy, drunken, often sadistically motivated Freikorps troops roving the towns and countryside and

carrying out summary executions on the basis of kangaroo court judgements. Toller went into hiding on 1 May and managed to remain there until 4 June. In the meantime the leader of the Communist takeover of the Councils Republic, Eugen Leviné, had been captured, tried summarily and shot in the prison of Stadelheim in Munich. It was to this prison that Toller was delivered, and he had no reason not to expect the same fate as Leviné and many others executed there. Following the intercession of many powerful figures on his behalf, including Thomas Mann, Toller was deemed to have acted out of honourable motives and was sentenced to five years of *Festungshaft*, a form of imprisonment intended to reflect the political rather than criminal motivation of the inmates, but which differed in few essential respects from ordinary incarceration.

‘Durchsuchung und Fesselung’ depicts the feelings and reactions of a captured prisoner. [GW II 309-310] The description of the captors surrounding the prisoner, ‘In Fratzenbündel splintern graue Wände’, is a highly expressionistic line which forcefully conveys the sense of panic, pain and disorientation being suffered. The image of the death’s head began in Toller’s poetry as a crystallisation of the horror of war, before becoming both in *Die Wandlung* and *Masse Mensch* a symbol of the deeply inhuman and oppressive effects of capitalism. It is no surprise therefore that what Toller sees as capitalism’s agents in the revolutions, the army, judiciary and prison system, are also depicted as possessing a skull-like aspect.

The opening pair of lines describes the treatment of the prisoners by their captors, but in terms which suggest that the latter derive sexual pleasure from their actions. The combination of the two adjectives in the first line, ‘nackt’ and ‘brutal’, imply a sadistic motive to the captors. The poem continues the contrasts established in this opening: while the prisoners are naked, it is the captors who are ‘schamlos’; the prisoners are chained yet free; and the final two stanzas make clear the contrast between slavery and tyranny. The implied impurity of the captors’ motives stands in stark relief against the altruism and selflessness of the prisoners and the tradition in which they stand.

This is a poem of defiance which celebrates the irrepressibility of the human and revolutionary spirits, yet it still communicates vividly the reality of the fear which complements and in a sense enhances them. As with a number of poems throughout the *Gedichte der Gefangenen*, this poem reminds us of part of the dedication at the start, from what was to be the poem ‘Den Toten der Revolution’ in *Vormorgen*:

Wer die Pfade bereitet,
stirbt an der Schwelle.
Doch es neigt sich vor ihm in Ehrfurcht
der Tod. [GW II 305]

The struggle with death both as a result of despair and of arbitrary mistreatment will be considered later, but this poem is a clear attempt to vindicate the death of so many revolutionaries. Toller's optimism that the world was on the verge of a new and more humanitarian order was to prove premature by the end of the decade and his disappointment at the collapse of German democracy and the unwillingness of other countries to address the rising tide of barbarism may have contributed to his decision to end his own life in 1939.

The 'Mauern der Geweihten' are the execution walls which form the background to the poem 'Die Mauer der Erschossenen', which will be considered presently and which also mentions the piercing by arrows. Although the martyrs in the struggle against tyranny are described as 'die Namenlosen', this should not be understood as a reference to the revolutionary figure of the same name in Masse Mensch. This description is intended merely to suggest that the victims of the suppression of the revolutions were not just too numerous to mention but in all likelihood also far more than the official records show, a point made both by Toller and Emil Julius Gumbel in their accounts of political justice during this period. The Gedichte der Gefangenen are after all dedicated to 'Den / namenlosen Toten / deutscher Revolution'. [GW II 305]

The reference to the 'Sklavenschiffe' provides the structural pivot for the concluding tercets. Overall, the central two lines occurring at the end of the second quatrain serve this function for the poem as a whole by associating the physical degradation the captives are suffering with their spiritual freedom. The introduction of 'Sklavenschiffe' links the specific reference to the sailors' mutinies, which were the catalysts for the political upheaval in Germany between 1917 and 1919, with the slave ships of classical civilization. This both puts the resistance to tyranny in a historical context, imbuing it with additional legitimacy, and providing the connection with Prometheus, who rebelled against Zeus' arbitrary treatment of mankind by bringing them the gift of fire. Toller was of course to develop his interest in the mutinies of the First World War in his later documentary drama Feuer aus den Kesseln! (1930).

In other poems in this collection such as 'Unser Weg' the use of religious vocabulary and ideas lends endorsement, dignity and gravitas to the revolutionary cause, but it is also part of a redefinition of the idea of salvation which comes to its most explicit expression in the final poem of the collection, 'Unser Weg'. Toller argued against the deferral of the promised time ('die verheißenen Zeiten') from the temporal to the hereafter, and in his memoirs and letters often shows his frustration with the implicit defusing of social dissatisfaction through the teachings of the Church.

In this and other poems he uses religious terms in the political rather than the religious sphere.

This process of secularisation is also prominent in 'Die Mauer der Erschossenen'. [GW II 314] The wall referred to is likely to have been that in Stadelheim prison in Munich which Toller describes in Justiz-Erlebnisse while recounting an unsuccessful attempt to shoot him:

Wir waren im Hof. Erst nach ein paar Runden Laufens im Quadrat begann das Herz rascher zu schlagen. Das Gefühl lebte das Geschehene nach. Es lebte um so stärker, als die eine Hofwand, an der über dreißig Menschen, Männer, Frauen, Knaben, in den Maitagen erschossen wurden, und erst neulich Eugen Leviné, von zahllosen Kugeleinschlägen zerlöchert war, die Erde davor eingetrocknete Blutlachen narbten.⁴

So piteous is the sight of this slaughter that even the wall becomes sentient, demonstrating far more pity than the executioners or even than God. The parallel with the original *pietà* scene is very close: it is the pity shown by bystanders after God has ignored the suffering undergone by the victims, and such is the depth of this sorrow that it would move even the stones.

The fact that an inanimate object, the wall, can achieve such pity for human suffering is of course a hard reflection on the lack of concern for the temporal fate of humanity of God and his Church. The impotence or unwillingness of God to halt these executions implies the irrelevance of organised religion to ordinary people with the implication that, if they cannot count on divine intervention, they must help themselves. They must orientate themselves therefore towards the temporal rather than the spiritual, to politics rather than to religion. 'Da Gott sich blendete und arm ward, nackt und bloß' is not intended as a direct criticism of the Almighty but rather of organised religion, which has been distracted by its own pomp and priorities and has failed to address real human suffering. A credo which allows itself to fail in such a way becomes 'arm [...], bloß und nackt' for practical purposes to ordinary people.

The mention of the martyr Saint Sebastian emphasises that these people who are being executed so mercilessly are nonetheless dying for a cause, moreover one which is just as valid as anything the early martyrs died for. The allusion both to the Virgin Mary and to Saint Sebastian are central to the working of the poem. It may be that in a much more subtle and sophisticated way here Toller is trying to achieve the object of 'Legende', namely the use of religious motifs to further his ends with a largely Christian public.

⁴ Toller, Justiz-Erlebnisse, Berlin, 1979, p. 86.

As in 'Durchsuchung und Fesselung', Toller stresses the degeneracy of the captors. While in the previous poem the cruelty had a sexual dimension, here it takes a Bacchic form as the captors rejoice in a wild orgy of slaughter. The reports of the gunfire are described as drunken laughter, with the effective use of the verb 'kollern' to describe it as the result of over-indulgence.⁵ In contrast, the earth into which the victims' blood runs turns 'zu bespienem Schoß', an image of defiled purity set in stark contrast to the nature of the oppressors. The comparison between perversity and purity is made here just as clearly as in 'Durchsuchung und Fesselung'.

Toller takes care to make the only human element in the poem the victims: the captors are not described as people at all, in order to avoid any lack of clarity in our allegiances and understanding of the victim/oppressor relationship. As a result, this enhances our appreciation of the natural and instinctive reaction of the wall, which is seen as part of the environment and not distinct from it. The earth in which it is embedded is seen as a womb, a frequent idea in Toller's work. In various poems we find a constellation of images surrounding the idea of the natural order. In the poem postulated as 'Der Entwurzelte', the healthy person is a tree rooted in the earth of the 'Heimat'; in 'Leichen im Priesterwald', Toller appeals to mothers to stop the degradation through war of the natural process of producing new generations, while in 'Legende' he castigates the unnaturalness of those mothers involved in armaments production. It is but a step, then, to see the earth as the mother of all things, defiled by the blood being spilt on it. As shall be seen in the next section and in Das Schwalbenbuch, the idea of the oneness of all things was to become more explicit in Toller's poetry and thinking.

The poem is very clearly and carefully constructed. The analogy of the wall to Saint Sebastian is introduced by two lines beginning 'Wie [...]' and completed by a further two lines beginning 'So [...]'. The proximate repetition of 'Wunden' stresses the pivotal point of the comparison. This is followed by four lines beginning 'Vor [...]' and a further four lines beginning 'Da [...]' before one eventually arrives at the *pietà* scene in the final two lines. While the form of the poem is broadly that of a sonnet, Toller is not fastidious in this poem about the number of feet in any given line. This is actually a very positive development, because the overall structure of the poem and the production of effective lines are not subordinated to purely formal considerations.

⁵ In fact there is a good factual basis for the description of the executioners as drunk. E. J. Gumbel records that many white troops carried out summary executions while under the influence of excessive amounts of alcohol.

Although the threat of immediate summary execution began to recede, the possibility of some entirely arbitrary event providing the excuse for shooting prisoners was ever-present. ‘Spaziergang der Sträflinge’ deals with the acclimatisation of prisoners to their loss of liberty, but set against a background of constant threat. [GW II 311] The fifth line refers to an occasion in Stadelheim prison in Munich at the end of June 1919 when six warders plotted to engineer a situation in which they could claim Toller had been shot while escaping. Although he avoided the trap through the intervention of other more sympathetic warders, the prison authorities claimed they were unable to identify the conspirators.

The publication of this poem in the Gedichte der Gefangenen was preceded by a substantially different version published in Die weißen Blätter in 1919 (see Appendix 2). The third, fourth and eighth lines are completely different, and certain amendments have been made to other lines. The imagery of sexual promiscuity and of predatory animals is present in both versions, but in the earlier version to a much more marked degree. The second half of the original first quatrain reads ‘Gezackte Fenster glotzen schrill und saugen / Wie Ungeziefer Blut zur winterlichen Saat’, and the original eighth line ‘Und gattet sie in ekler Brunst’. By replacing the original third and fourth lines with references to ‘Proleten’, Toller changes the emphasis of the poem from description of the environment to concentration on the victims, encouraging us to adopt their perspective. Their description as victims of the system also accentuates their helplessness in this hostile environment. The replacement of the eighth line was probably a matter of judgement arising from the feeling that the original line was rather too exaggerated and active for a poem which relies on a mood of constant latent threat. It can be said too that these changes enable the poem to fit better into the generally more subtle and sober tone of the Gedichte der Gefangenen.

In his early poetry Toller made positive use of light and colour. Here they serve as yet another oppressive feature to the prisoner emerging from the darkened cell, and as such are referred to in negative terms: ‘stumpfen [...] lichtentwöhnte [...] trübes Licht [...] blinzelt matt [...] bläulich rote Wunde’. Similarly, just as elements of synaesthesia were used previously in a constructive manner, in the first version ‘glotzen schrill’ is used to convey the sensory bombardment undergone by the emerging prisoners. This element is still an important component of the Gedichte der Gefangenen version, but as with the sexual and animal imagery, it has been rendered somewhat less drastic. For example, the suggested perverted sexuality of ‘Durchsuchung und Fesselung’, which finds an echo in the first version of the current poem, becomes in the Gedichte der Gefangenen version jaded and cursory, as the light ‘betastet schlaffe Körper und zerbricht’.

The third and fourth lines of the Gedichte der Gefangenen version are provocatively political, reflecting Toller's anger at the treatment both of himself and of his fellow-prisoners, and suggest that he felt that the time was still appropriate for an agitational sentiment. This misplaced optimism was no doubt a product of his isolation from the course of political events since the suppression of the Councils Republic in 1919. The change from 'Proleten' to 'Gehetzte' in the revised version of the poem in Vormorgen in 1924 suggests that 'Steinverlies' is intended to dramatise the incarceration of the prisoners, but photographs seem to show that the blocks in Niederschönenfeld were above ground. And finally the mention of 'Paragraphen' could be expected to strike a chord with those who were obliged to live in an increasingly authoritarian republic.⁶

One of the themes is the oppressiveness of prison life, whereby prisoners become so conditioned to life in the cell that they are unable to adapt to the relative freedom of the prison yard. The feeling of isolation is underlined when Toller describes the cessation of normal, bustling life at the prison gates, 'Vorm Tore starb der Stadt Gewimmel'. The poem continues an idea raised at the start of the 1921 collection: 'Kamerad, in jeder Stadt, in jedem Dorf begleitet dich ein Gefängnis'. This thought is re-emphasised later in the collection in 'Besucher' and in one of the final poems 'Entlassene Sträflinge'. So crucial was this idea that it recurs in the long introductory poem to the second edition of the Gedichte der Gefangenen in 1923, which will be discussed in Chapter 5: 'Wer kann von sich sagen, er sei nicht gefangen?'. [GW II 356]

The simile of the sky as a gaping reddish-blue wound is a rich one, and works on several levels. Firstly, the sky and the unbounded freedom it represents are a constant reiteration to the prisoner of his deprivation of liberty, and it is a wound which will not close as long as he remains incarcerated. Secondly, imprisonment has brought about in the captive a mentality whereby the cell represents security, and even such an innocuous thing as the sky takes its place amongst the other elements which

⁶ The obsession with the power of the *Paragraphen* continued throughout the Weimar Republic. Kurt Tucholsky, a close collaborator of Toller on the Weltbühne, wrote in the poem 'Ein Wort' in 1930:

Denn das deutsche Volk kann nur ruhig schlafen
hinter einer Hecke von §§§. [...]

Denn die Bremse ist das Wichtigste an einem deutschen Wagen.

Im Verboten sind sie groß. Im Gewähren sind sie klein.

Kurt Tucholsky, Politische Justiz, ed. by Martin Swarzenski, Reinbek, 1970, p. 13.

go to comprise the atmosphere of subdued threat. And finally, particularly with its reddish tinge it is a reminder both of the fallen of the revolution and of the wound inflicted on society, which can only heal when the work of the revolutionaries is eventually completed.

The daydreaming of one of the prisoners in the third stanza is reminiscent of that of the soldier in 'Sämann-Soldat' and looks forward to 'Gang zur Ruhestellung' from the Verse vom Friedhof in which a soldier, unable to take in the horror of a mass grave, drifts off into childhood memories. Toller introduces this device where he wishes to show an individual at odds with his environment in an atmosphere of horror and threat, in which he is unable to assimilate the full nature of the situation. The device also has the effect of drawing the reader into the poem and encouraging identity with the poetic subject.

While 'Spaziergang der Sträflinge' describes the feeling of alienation between the prisoner and his surroundings, 'Schlaflose Nacht' explores the arbitrary division between captor and captive. [GW II 309] The poem depicts two worlds, those of captors and captives, which co-exist in close proximity but do not touch. This agonising proximity lends weight to Toller's appeal to common humanity. The conjunction of 'Schlag', the footsteps, and 'Herzschlag' in the same line emphasises both the physical closeness of captor and captive as well as the extent to which the wellbeing of the prisoners is dependent on the attitudes and actions of the guards.

There is a different tenor to his attitude towards his captors from that in the previous poems we have considered in this sub-section, which emphasise the fear and shock of capture and incarceration. Toller also begins to differentiate between warders and guards, and this is supported by many instances related in Justiz-Erlebnisse, Eine Jugend in Deutschland and the Briefe aus dem Gefängnis where he recounts kindnesses shown to him by individual warders. With its suggestion of servility, 'buckeln' helps to portray the captors themselves as victims and lackeys of the system which they serve - it is another step towards some sort of reconciliation.

As in the war poetry, Toller appeals to common humanity: 'Oh, Fluch gesetzter Grenzen!'. Whereas the borders in the war poetry were of a geopolitical nature, here they are purely political. Yet the division is not on class lines, as both warders and most of the prisoners would regard themselves as working-class, thus making the divisions even more arbitrary. There is however not the optimism about change here that we found in 'Brief', discussed in the previous chapter: 'Da sind wir Schützer. / Oder Feind. Wie wir's bestimmen.' [APP] The borders are set and people are depicted as helpless, 'ohne Wahl'. One way of transcending these barriers

is the recognition of common humanity. However the 'Schicksal' which binds all people is death, as Toller makes explicit in the final line. He is not advocating death as a uniting force: rather he implies that it is a waste of human potential if death is allowed to be the ultimate leveller, particularly if it were the result of the failure of people to generate the will to understand the underlying communality of humanity.

The predominant elements of the atmosphere in the poem are fear, cold and hate. The first two stanzas are linguistically rich and effectively evoke the impression of the sensory void of the prisoners being populated by darkness, fear and echoes. The proliferation of sibilants evokes the notion of whispers in the dark, and the conjunction of various homophones conjures up an image of deceptive echoes, 'scharfen [...] schlaflos [...] starre [...] schwarzes [...] schwarzen'. The rhyme scheme of the initial pair of stanzas moves in the concluding tercets into an ABBABA pattern, increasing the reader's disorientation to match that of the sensorily deprived prisoners. The quatrains describe the specific situation, while the tercets explore the more general implications, making it a tightly constructed and evocative poem.

In the final poem to be considered in this section, 'Gemeinsame Haft', Toller turns his attention to the relations between prisoners and to the examination of *Haftpsychose*. [GW II 320-321] In a letter to Netty Katzenstein of 3 March 1921 he describes the symptoms of this condition:

Eine Energielosigkeit, die mich erschrickt, hat sich meiner bemächtigt. Und - eine fast krankhafte Abneigung gegen jedes Zusammensein mit Kameraden, mit Menschen. Es geht so weit, daß ich physischen Schmerz empfinde, wenn ich Gesichter anschauen muß. Haft zeugt Feindseligkeit gegen alle Geselligkeit, erstickt den sozialen Trieb, züchtet Misanthropen. [GW V 63]

Compulsory confinement in the presence of others has three principal consequences: firstly, a manic compulsion to talk about and justify oneself; secondly, a highly critical attitude towards others born of the inability to escape their company; and thirdly, a tendency at times to recoil completely from contact with others and to descend into introspection and self-absorption. This is no reflection on the prisoners themselves - after all, they had all been imprisoned for their efforts to create what they saw as a more just social order. It is confinement which is the problem ('Die eingesperrten Menschen sind nicht gut'), just as outside prison it is social conditions which produce anti-social behaviour in ordinary people.

The phenomena described in the poem form a kind of herd panic which produces cruelty in prisoners, as Toller explained in a letter to Adolf von Hatzfeld of 27 January 1922:

Ich lebte stiller und reicher, würde ich nicht in einer Haft leben, in der arme, zerquälte, verbitterte Menschen, in einem Zellengang aufeinandergepfercht, sich Jahr um Jahr, Tag um Tag blutend zermürben. [GW V 89]

The comparison of prisoners to caged animals is not intended in any way to be read pejoratively, either in this poem or in 'Besucher' (see section 3.2.4). The reaction of animals to their confinement is entirely natural, for it is an inherently unnatural state, moreover one imposed by man himself, with the implications which that has for the morality of such cruelty. The comparison between the state of nature and man-made chaos is a prevalent feature of the war poetry published in Vormorgen in 1924, and the use of animal analogies to underline the inherent unnaturalness of man's social order underpins the Schwalbenbuch of the same year. As Toller noted to Netty Katzenstein in a letter of 12 December 1923, it is the retreat into introspection which enabled him to perceive the equality of both man and animal in the natural order:

[...] er verbirgt sich im Schneckenhaus seiner Einsamkeit. Seine Einsamkeit ist die Insel geworden, auf der er Gemeinsamkeit mit Mensch und Tier und Welt erfuhr. [GW V 171]

It may be that the image of prisoners as caged animals prompted Kurt Tucholsky in his poem 'Haben Sie schon mal ... ?' (1926), dedicated to Toller, to include the lines 'Oben dämmert ein Quadrat mit Gittern; / unten liegt ein Tier und darf nur zittern ...'.⁷ The unnaturalness of this situation is further emphasised by the images of sickness and physical decay in the second and third stanzas.

Supporting the effective imagery of the poem is once more an equally effective structure. The repetition of 'Die eingesperrten Menschen sind' smooths the transition between the stanzas and provides the poem with an axis. Similarly the final three lines beginning 'Weil' follow on from the 'weil' in the final line of the third stanza, and the use of such a forceful conjunction and its implication of rationality contrast effectively with the asylum-like atmosphere created towards the end of the poem. The form has become once more an integral part of the situation which Toller is trying to convey.

3.2.2 Seclusion and inner life

It was a fascinating and worrying paradox to Toller that, in the midst of such close confinement, prisoners could nonetheless slip into apathy and self-absorption, into the 'Chaos ihres Ichs' described in 'Gemeinsame Haft'. Given that the flight into introspection was the only real privacy to which he had access, the challenge for him

⁷ Ibid., p. 109.

was to shape this phenomenon to a positive end. The seven poems to be considered in this section document this process which, like the overall adjustment to prison life and conditions of which it forms part, shows a definite process of acclimatisation despite indications in two poems that it was not linear. Overall, the poems demonstrate a huge strength of character which enabled Toller even under the most difficult conditions to orientate himself towards positive aspects and opportunities in his experience of prison.

Five of the poems, in the order in which they appear in the Gedichte der Gefangenen, show a progression from a balance between positive and negative aspects to an almost entirely optimistic view of his circumstances. These are 'Lied der Einsamkeit', 'Dämmerung', 'Verweilen um Mitternacht', 'Pfade zur Welt' and 'Begegnung in der Zelle'. The two poems which are generally negative in tone but allow us to glimpse the positive potential of isolation, 'November' and 'Nächte', are featured towards the end of the collection. By doing this, Toller forces the reader to accept that there is no such thing as complete adjustment to prison life, that those positives which he has managed to eke from the experience are a necessary mechanism for the maintenance of his emotional and mental equilibrium, and that they are bought at a considerable cost.

'November' is the last of these poems to appear in the collection and of them the least positive. [GW II 319] The ideas leading up to the writing of the poem had occupied Toller for some time. In a letter to Netty Katzenstein of 9 October 1920 he describes the monotonous passage of time in prison: 'Die Monate im Gefängnis zerfließen formlos, farblos ...'. [GW V 53] Just over a year later on 13 December 1921 he writes positively to the French author and socialist Romain Rolland of the 'mönchische Einsamkeit' achieved 'trotz der grauen Farblosigkeit zerfliehender Tage'. [GW V 85] These descriptions accord closely with the view of life in the poem as 'Ein formlos farbenleer Zerfließen', almost a form of ritual torture in which, like some constantly reiterated punishment from classical mythology, the prisoners are obliged to relive the 'Jahre unsrer Jugend' and the failure of the revolution. There is also a fatalistic religious element. The prison is a form of sacrilege, 'Wie Flüche wider Gott', they are 'verdamm't' and they must 'irren' in a semi-mortal state, dying at night and being reborn to endure the tedium of the days. It is also evocative of the Ahasver legend, the Jew condemned to wander, which featured so prominently in Die Wandlung and with whom Toller identifies himself in poems such as 'Der Entwurzelte'.

The poem evinces desperation rather than political optimism. The prisoners have provided the necessary political lead, but it has not been followed by 'dieses

müde Sklavenvolk'. We are at quite some distance here from the hopes for spontaneous uprising expressed in the poem of his early youth 'Auf, erwacht!', cited in Eine Jugend in Deutschland, and from the admonitory tone of support for the war conditional on subsequent social change in 'Aus den Erläuterungen des Bundesrats'. 'Wer wird Freiheit schauen?' suggests that although on leaving prison they will be technically at liberty, real freedom cannot exist if social conditions outside remain unchanged.

This mood of despair is heightened by the physical environment of the prisoners, their separation from outside, the time of day and the season of the year. The face of the cell block is likened to a skull with burnt-out eyes, and the ideas of death, violence and disease are emphasised throughout ('schwarzen [...] würgt [...] Grauen [...] Fieberlarven [...] verdammt [...] Leprosen [...] Särge'). Many elements remind us of his early dramas. The 'Fieberlarven' take us to the 'Lazarett' scenes of Die Wandlung, and the damned who must travel unendingly through the 'formlos farbenleer Verfließen' remind us of the colonial soldiers with their chant of 'Ewig fahren wir'. The mention of masks in conjunction with 'antlitzlos' recall the masked scenes in both Die Wandlung and Masse Mensch, as well as the hideous face in the poem 'Sylvester 1916'.

In the midst of this monotony, nights are described as 'gnädig': normally, mercy can only come from God, who represents victory over death. In the unnatural circumstances of the prison, even death can take on a positive value, as will be seen in the poems on the theme of death in the next section. Night is redemptive here, but not in the more positive sense of the other poems in this section. Here it merely shuts out the day, the absence of light means that a prisoner can deny his circumstances. Night is welcomed not because it lends perception, but because it blocks it. Oblivion is celebrated, and all that normally lends meaning to life is rejected. There is a suggestion that not all nights provide this relief though, hence the emphasis of 'die Nächte'. With the inclusion of 'Särge' in the final line it is clear that night is closely associated with death, both of which are a merciful release not just from the monotony of the day but also from the constant physical reminders of deprivation of liberty.

The poem 'Nächte' goes on to describe the different kinds of night the prisoner can experience, not all of them by any means positive or beneficial. [GW II 318] As Toller explained in a letter to Netty Katzenstein of 27 May 1923, any individual night can take the prisoner through a whole range of emotions:

Eine Nacht kriecht langsam heran, hüllt mich in die schwarzen Tücher der schweigenden Umarmung. Sanfte Tücher, die alle Spannung lösen. Dann

aber starr werden, immer starrer, in einen Sarg sich wandeln, der zu eng ist,
zu niedrig, der die Brust eindrückt, die Glieder bricht. -
Nacht unendlicher Folterungen. [GW V 148]

As in 'November', the night begins as a welcome release from the tedium and alienation of the day. In its turn, it then also becomes too constrictive, like a coffin enclosing the prisoner, and releases sexual frustration, fear of death and beautiful but exasperatingly irrevocable fantasies. Sexual desire is related only to the prisoner's need for sexual outlet, not to any emotional reciprocation, reminding us as in 'Gemeinsame Haft' that 'Die eingesperrten Menschen sind nicht gut'. Sexual frustration mingles with fear of mortality, as 'Fratzen' mock the prisoner's sexual desperation. By using 'du' as the poetic focus, Toller seeks to draw the reader into identification with the plight of the prisoner.

The night-time isolation of the prisoner compounds these frustrations. Like children frightened of the dark, they are forced by the night to seek the reassurance of the physical presence of others. Night becomes a prison within a prison, forcing the prisoner to look within himself and in a sense to become his own tormentor. The night only appears to hide things, when in fact it is a liberator both of positive and negative potential, as the ability consciously to control thoughts and feelings begins to wane.

The first published version of the poem, which predates the Gedichte der Gefangenen version, has a substantially different second stanza:

Die Nächte bergen Trotz und Fluchen,
Verwünschung, Stöhnen, grellen Zank.
Wen Freiheit zerrt, macht Dunkel krank.
In Augen blutet großes Suchen.⁸

Here the element of sexual frustration is reduced to a suggestion in the final line. The emphasis is more on the prisoner's resentment of captivity and of the system of justice and the individuals who deprived him of his liberty. Night in this version is a more implicitly negative force, whereas the 1921 version stresses its role as an enabler of potential, good or bad.

Contrasting with the 'Not des Blutes' in the Gedichte der Gefangenen version are the 'niegesungne Lieder'. Night-time gives the illusion of removing physical confinements to the imagination, but the ideas and inspirations evaporate like the morning mist ('Nachttau'). The velvet butterflies of inspiration kiss 'die verborgnen Dinge': these might be ideas which one is capable of evolving if one were aware of

⁸ 'Nächte' in 'Drei Sonette. Von Ernst Toller', Der Freihafen, 2 (1919/20), H. 10, p. 147.

their existence; but it might also be the ability to express deeply hidden ideas and feelings, which one senses consciously but cannot find adequate expression for. One more frustration, but of a very much more gentle kind, and furthermore one which points to a real positive potential in seclusion if the will of the prisoner can force it in that direction.

A further step in Toller's re-channeling of the potential of solitude can be seen in 'Lied der Einsamkeit', the first of a series of five poems which chart an ever more positive view of isolation. [GW II 312] The beginnings of this can be seen in a letter to Netty Katzenstein of 1 September 1920, in which he uses the isolation of his cell to accompany her and Betty Frankenstein in his imagination to Italy. At this stage he begins to write about the positive potential of prison life and about his confidence that he will withstand its rigours: 'Nicht Angst haben, ich lasse mich nicht unterbekommen, ich zerbreche nicht. Diese Gewißheit habe ich längst: Gefängnismauern werden mich nicht zerbrechen.' [GW V 35] In a letter only three days later he restates this generally positive view in terms directly connected with 'Lied der Einsamkeit', and similarly finishes with a reminder of the harsh realities which daylight reveals:

Der Abend ist mein träumerischer Genosse, der sich sehr sanft an mich schmiegt und zu leuchten beginnt in vielen Farben, die alle etwas Fernes haben und von leichten Schatten verhängt sind. Der Traum ist aber mein Freund. [...] Ich erwachte. Im Zellengang der Lärm des Morgens. [GW V 46-47]

The sensuality of evening and isolation, the liberation of the imagination and the crushing reality of daylight are ideas embodied in the current poem.

By removing the obvious reminders of incarceration, evening - the time when prisoners were locked individually in their cells - enables the imagination to roam unfettered. The ability to imagine also has a sensuous potential, the stiffening of resolve being associated with sexual arousal and erection, the 'Schoß' of evening coming into the proximity of 'Schwert', and with the description of evening as a woman caressing the prisoner. The positive potential of seclusion is described in terms of natural profusion and fecundity: 'Wald [...] blüht sie maienliches Feld [...] Schoß'. Sexual connotations are linked with the function of love as the giver of life, as in 'Schwangeres Mädchen auf dem Gefängnishof'. There is no trace here either of the wild and destructive sexual frustration in 'Nächte' or of the perversion of the guards in 'Durchsuchung und Fesselung'. The linking of the creative (and the procreative) with the sensual is similar to Toller's early poems.

When he describes the fantasy world he has constructed in order to cope with imprisonment, he uses the imagery of his early poetry. Once more there is mention

of 'Kathedralen', which also in 'Aufrüttelung' suggested a state of (self-) delusion. Seclusion is a barrier, a 'brandend Meer', 'eine Wehr', 'ein Wald' sealing off the outside. Night and isolation insulate him from the realities of prison life. This is a protection mechanism: rather than recognise and suffer the reality of imprisonment, he keeps it at arm's length. At night, the prisoner can convince himself that the isolation is almost self-imposed, because the physical confinement of the cell is cloaked by darkness.

The daylight, however, reveals the physical reality of imprisonment. Toller uses the versification to emphasise the jarring effect of morning light: 'hingeträumter Nacht' abuts straight on to 'Doch ihre Morgen'. After the opening out of the cell through the use of imagination, it collapses in on him with the morning light. Prison life is actually the enemy of imagination and creativity, and the disillusionment in the morning is bitter. True creativity can only arise from seclusion in freedom. The poem is no hymn to seclusion, because both its escapist and coldly real potential are described. Circumstances dictate which of these potentials is to be dominant.

The poem demonstrates both linguistic and structural sophistication. Sibilants abound in the central two stanzas, 'Süße [...] Stille [...] Stunden [...] Schoß [...] stählern Schwert [...] schmiegt [...] schlanker [...] Sehnsucht [...] sanftes Schwingen'. This evokes the idea of soft whispers in the dark, as though in the world of his imagination conversations are going on around him. This then contrasts starkly with the generally harsher consonants of the final tercet. The use of the homophones 'brandend' and 'Brände' in the second and twelfth lines reinforce the structure of the poem through the contrast of the prisoner's feelings in the evening and in the morning. In the final tercet, Toller abandons the iambic metre he has used hitherto and, with the inclusion of two recomposed separable verbs, provides metrical support for the dislocation and disorientation produced by the intrusion of daylight. Once more, Toller shows himself willing to adapt poetic form, even such a clearly defined form as the sonnet, to suit his poetic purpose.

With the next poem, 'Dämmerung', Toller becomes unequivocally positive about the effect of darkness and isolation. [GW II 317] Traditionally one thinks of these as the most feared privations a prisoner can face short of actual physical torture, but it is a testament to Toller's strength of character that he was able to reinterpret them as advantages of prison life. The passage from day into night calms the resentment and frustrations of the prisoners and sets free the imagination. Evening is 'Genosse', a positive force which turns seclusion and confinement into potential; in the introductory poem to the second edition of the Gedichte der Gefangenen in

1923, 'An alle Gefangenen', dusk is even more familiar: 'Dämmerung, gütige Schwester der Gefangenen'.

The silence and tranquillity of sunset are described as 'eine milde Welle', the precursor to the 'brandend Meer' of seclusion and isolation in 'Lied der Einsamkeit'. The onset of darkness frees the imagination, and the fantasy world is described in terms reminiscent of some of Toller's earliest poetry. The 'opalne Helle' which the darkness gains recalls 'im duftopalnen Tau' in 'Resignation', while in the midst of cell doors slamming there is 'ein bunter Klang', like the 'Orgelklang' accompanying the act of love in 'Umarmung'. In this way Toller rehabilitates vocabulary which was once employed to excessively decorative ends.

This change of perspective on imprisonment turns the warders into 'scheele Gäste', isolation becomes a 'Fest', the prisoners are 'reich'. The liberated imagination inverts accepted values: the imprisoned are free, the poor are rich. The guards cannot be part of this world and their depiction is full of negative and thwart vocabulary: 'schlürfen [...] scheele Gäste [...] grämlich [...] trockne Schläfe'. Their experience is entirely foreign to that of the prisoners: 'Es ist kein Ruf, der ihre Herzen träfe'. The image is even sinister: with 'scheele' and 'schlürfen' there is a suggestion of deformity, like the cliché of the medieval hunchback warder.

'Verweilen um Mitternacht' takes the power of the liberated imagination a step further, enabling the prisoner even to roam outside the confines of the prison. [GW II 317-318] He is jarred from his sleep by the tolling of the bells at midnight. The prison at Niederschönenfeld had once been a monastery and so would in all likelihood have had a bell tower. Its earlier status may well have provided the stimulus for the comparison between the temporal and spiritual in 'Unser Weg' and the metaphysical contemplations in 'Pfade zur Welt'.

The heartbeat of (physical) life combines with the bells, life is tied to earthly time. When the bells stop, we hear the heartbeat no more. But out of the silence comes the possibility of new (and eternal) life: 'Nur tiefer Stille wird Gebären'. Silence is the source of dreams and thought, creativity. The interruptive sound will return to silence as a state of rest and potential, 'In Schoß der Quelle'.

Life, represented by the tolling of the bells, intrudes violently on the dreamlike and meditative state, 'wie Stürme'. The bells signify the passage of time, to which temporal (as opposed to spiritual) life is tied. The old town, society outside prison, must exist within time, bow to its dictates ('Sie beugt sich tief') and be prepared to decay and fall back into the pool of potential, 'In Schoß der Quelle einzumünden'. Those who seek their roots in the earth however, which is eternal, are connected in a more fundamental fashion to the universe and can rise up 'im Licht der Ewigkeiten'.

The town on the other hand is a physical, man-made construct and thus subject to the whims of history, 'die Zeiten', linked with the time marked out by the bells. The old town can do nothing against the passage of time - 'Die alte Stadt fühlt hilflos die gewordne Zeit'. On the other hand, the contemplative opportunities to develop his views will produce a perspective 'im Licht der Ewigkeiten'. Removed from physical constraints, he is able to address himself to more fundamental principles of existence.

Perhaps the ringing of the bells, combined with the threshold state of sleep, transport Toller back to his home town. As 'der Wandernde' he is now a stranger to it, hence 'Wer in der Erde wurzelt, rauscht': his roots are no longer in a particular place, the earth in general provides his roots and silence his inspiration - 'meine Heimat ist die Erde', as Toller states in Eine Jugend in Deutschland. [GW IV 227] The figure of the wanderer reminds us of 'Der Entwurzelte' and 'Der Ringende', but also of Friedrich in the seventh *Bild* of Die Wandlung, where the enigmatic and almost supernatural figure of the Schwester encourages him to experience life, but as though descending to it from a higher level, like a Greek god assuming human form. These are stages on the way to his mission as a saviour, 'Dein Weg führt dich zu Gott [...] der in der Menschheit lebt'. [GW II 40] This we have also seen in 'Der Heiland geht durch die Vorstadt': the wanderer figure there travels through the world but has no effect on it because the world itself is only a way-station to a higher destiny. In his dream state the wanderer in the present poem is able to roam the world and the universe untrammelled, 'Ob allen Sternen [...] ferne Sphären [...] im Licht der Ewigkeiten'. Night and silence remove the physical bounds to exploring the world around him. And at such a remove from the everyday distractions of the world he is able to evolve his wider perspective: 'Aus Stunden formt sich Antlitz gen die Zeiten'.

The macrocosmic scale is continued in 'Pfade zur Welt', and as the title suggests we find Toller looking for the connection between his metaphysical contemplations and his day-to-day experience. [GW II 316] The limited range of experience of the prisoner means that he is obliged to seek significance in smaller things, but the lack of distraction in his restricted lifestyle enables him to see the universal significance and connections of trivial things which those outside take for granted. The pattern of the whole of reality is revealed in each and every constituent part, however small, if we but look for it, and humans like any other part of existence are 'verwoben' in the fabric of life. The mood is very much that of Das Schwalbenbuch: all living things, including plants, have significance and are worthy of respect, a dying flower as much as a sick child. In this the prisoner is a

‘Wanderer’, looking for a hidden reality and connections behind the apparent and the mundane.

Prison is depicted as a monastery in that, far from the world, it gives time for contemplation. The world outside is a loud and frenetic place which obstructs the perception of underlying reality and of the oneness of existence. The reality of man’s world is an illusion compared with the deeper reality of creation. This isolation enables the prisoner to look beyond apparent reality. Just like that of a monk, the life of the prisoner is opposed to ‘den lauten Dingen’: as in other poems there is the implication of a quiet, almost Trappist existence. Towards the end of this section we shall consider the monastic dimension of prison life in the light of Toller’s reading of Rilke’s Das Stunden-Buch.

Prison suffering has produced an empathy with all living things. There is an intimate connection between all levels of experience which supercedes even ideas of God. We are all part ‘des namenlosen Alls’, human and divine if we would but accept it. In the seventh *Bild* of Die Wandlung the mystical figure of the Schwester tells Friedrich that he is to go ‘Zu Gott, der in der Menschheit lebt’. Toller’s God is not separate from or superior to creation, a God ‘am Dirigentenpult’, but rather a manifestation of it. [GW II 40] Unfortunately Toller himself does not define this mysticism, but it can be seen as a broadly religious sense of wonder at the harmony of creation. Toller’s mysticism comes from many sources: Greek and Germanic mythology, Jewish and Christian traditions, even astrology - ‘die hymnische Musik der Sterne’. The respect for life is also Buddhist in conception, as is the sense that all manifestations of nature are the expression of a fundamental life spirit. The unwillingness to subscribe to any one metaphysical system allows Toller to convey his sense of wonder in a more universal manner, and the reliance on mythologies is not so overwhelming that it would alienate a reader of any given faith.

The metaphysical considerations are connected with the lighter side of human character, positive human potential, with ‘Ein guter Blick des Wächters’, ‘Brüderliches Leben’ and ‘menschlich Lachen’. The poem is in far more optimistic mood than some of the earlier ones. The embittered enmities of prisoners in ‘Gemeinsame Haft’ are balanced by an acceptance of communality, and in contrast to ‘Spaziergang der Sträflinge’ there is positive potential in the warders.

The sonnet form is here a perfect vehicle for the strategy of the poem. We have a classic *Steigerung* from the inorganic stones and water to blades of grass, the least complex of the organisms cited, through flowers, birds and human beings to the stars. Human society in the nearby town produces superficial laughter, but the isolated prisoner listens to the music of the spheres. This gradual increase in scale

and complexity works so effectively that this is one of the two poems in the Gedichte der Gefangenen which are included absolutely unchanged in the Lieder der Gefangenen.

The mysticism described in the poem was to become a significant feature of Toller's thinking throughout the rest of his time in prison. In a letter to Netty Katzenstein of 14 March 1923 he talks about his relation both to organic and inorganic life, a theme developed in 'Der Gefangene und der Tod', to be considered in the next section. Just over a fortnight later, on 29 March, he writes to her of his impressions of spring: 'Bei Eindrücken von Natur und Menschen bleiben von tausenden nur die haften, die jene Vollkommenheit der Form aufweisen, die wir in der Kunst, geprägt, suchen.' [GW V 145] Individual elements of the universe complement and reflect the whole, and art is a means of recording human impressions of this perfection. Implicit in this is the suggestion that art can only imperfectly render the splendour of creation.

The poem which represents the cell environment most positively is the final one in this group of five, 'Begegnung in der Zelle'. [GW II 311-312] It has a fairy tale or nursery rhyme quality to it and displays the childlike *Dinghaftigkeit* about which Toller writes to a young worker almost two years later on 25 June 1923:

Die meisten [...] glauben das Leben zu deuten und - wissen nicht, wie fern sie dem Leben sind. Wenigen gelingt es, alles Wissen haltend, hineinzuwachsen in einen neuen Stand der Kindheit, der mit der ersten Kindheit gemeinsam hat die tiefe instinktsichere Lebensnähe und ihr voraus hat das umfassende Wissen. Dort ist der Mensch zugleich in allem und über allem. [GW V 155]

This formulation represents the thrust both of the current poem and of 'Pfade zur Welt', that of a less apparently sophisticated view of the world leading to deeper insights, the appreciation of simplicity leading to a deeper understanding of the interconnections of existence.

Initially the prisoners were frightened, intimidated and frustrated by their environment, and raged against it 'während [...] Arme hilflos brachen'. Their own cell, although imposed on them, is nonetheless a haven and becomes their personal space. The poem shows the way in which the imposed environment becomes the prisoner's natural habitat. Toller has come from resentment of his conditions through acceptance to rejoicing in them. The familiarity even breeds reliance, as when Toller states in Eine Jugend in Deutschland that prison can become a kind of 'Mutter'. [GW IV 233] In such an environment he was able to achieve a level of concentration and reflection which he was denied for any other concerted period in his life.

This is a world of pure fantasy, but it is not a poem without balance. The counterweight is night-time when the only connection with the world outside, the window, will be blotted out in the darkness. Toller would not want us to be left with

the unequivocal impression that prison is somehow a natural environment, and so he leaves us in doubt as to illusion and reality. We have a view of the objects in the cell based on a certain mood or condition of daylight. At night-time the imagination can see the heads of the executed rearing up from the door; in daylight all becomes harmless. Objects and experiences in prison are ambivalent: slight shifts in perception can change their character entirely. Exceptionally in this poem it is daylight and not night-time which lends the friendly aspect to the cell environment.

A first version of this poem published in Der Freihafen in 1921 presents a number of problems which are resolved by the version in the Gedichte der Gefangenen.⁹ The later version inserts 'erst' into the first line, making sense of the use of the present tense throughout. 'Erträge' is trimmed down to 'träge' and the tautology in 'Totenköpfe der Erschossenen' is excised. In the penultimate line 'schaue' is repeated in order to match up the scansion of the final two lines. Overall though this can be described as poetic fine-tuning, and the Gedichte der Gefangenen version survived into the Lieder der Gefangenen in a far less substantially revised form than the great majority of the sonnets.

The poems considered in this section form not just an important strand of the collection as a whole but provide us with insights into Toller's state of mind at different stages throughout his imprisonment. It must be stressed that they do not form a neatly concluded progression towards successful adaptation to prison conditions. It is not only the placing of these poems in between others which describe aspects of the experience which Toller finds intolerable which allow us to conclude this. The poems themselves are never totally positive about imprisonment: there is always some element of doubt or a stanza which shows the relapse into harsher realities.

What the poems show without any doubt is the effort of will by Toller to find some constructive aspect of the experience and then to orientate himself towards that, even in the midst of blacker moments. His strategy was to recast the experience as a form of monastic seclusion which allowed him to study widely and to contemplate the more fundamental aspects of life. In indulging this perspective, Toller was almost able to convince himself that the seclusion was self-willed. The stimulus for this strategy probably came from his reading of Rainer Maria Rilke's Das Stunden-Buch (1905), a collection of poetic contemplations from a monkish perspective. Toller was so impressed by this collection that he wrote in praise of it to Rilke in September

⁹ 'Begegnung in der Zelle', Der Freihafen, 4 (1921), p. 37.

1920.¹⁰ In a letter to Netty Katzenstein of 9 October 1920, considerably before the publication of the Gedichte der Gefangenen, Toller quotes at length from Rilke and then encourages her: 'Lies Rilkes Stundenbuch, lies es in stillen Stunden, wie Fromme eine Bibel lesen'. [GW V 53] In a letter to Romain Rolland just over one year later on 13 December 1921 Toller describes his time in prison thus far: 'Nun lebe ich bald zwei Jahre im Gefängnis, ein Leben mönchischer Einsamkeit'. [GW V 85] Undoubtedly Toller's reading of Rilke's collection affected the general tone of the Gedichte der Gefangenen and the composition of it as a series of contemplations, and this process was reinforced by Toller's choice of the sonnet form. The similarities extend to many of the themes explored in both collections: the effect of darkness, individuation and isolation, separation from the outside world and the oneness of existence, amongst others.

There are parallels even in certain images and phrasings in the texts of the poems. In the section 'Vom mönchischen Leben' Rilke writes:

Und manchmal bin ich wie der Baum,
der, reif und rauschend, über einem Grabe
den Traum erfüllt, den der vergangne Knabe
verlor in Traurigkeiten und Gesängen.¹¹

While the overall poetic intention is not identical, there is here the mention of 'Baum' and 'Wurzeln' which have occurred so often in Toller's poetry and have always signified a sense of identity and purpose, for example in 'Der Entwurzelte': 'Sei Erdreich! / Baum! / Der in Dir wissend Wurzel schlägt.' [APP] Similarly in 'Verweilen um Mitternacht' from the Gedichte der Gefangenen one reads: 'Wer in der Erde wurzelt, rauscht'.

In the same section Rilke's monk compares his closeness to (and by extension his separation from) God to that between neighbouring cell-mates:

Nur eine schmale Wand ist zwischen uns,
durch Zufall; denn es könnte sein:
ein Rufen deines oder meines Munds -
und sie bricht ein
ganz ohne Lärm und Laut.¹²

¹⁰ Toller, letter to Rilke of 29 September 1920, in Rainer Maria Rilke 1875-1975, ed. by J. W. Storck, Munich, 1975, p. 239.

¹¹ Rainer Maria Rilke, Sämtliche Werke. Herausgegeben vom Rilke-Archiv in Verbindung mit Ruth Sieber-Rilke, Frankfurt am Main, 1955, p. 255.

¹² Ibid., p. 255.

In 'Schlaflose Nacht' Toller criticises the arbitrariness of that which separates prisoner from guard, and in 'Nächte' there is the separation of prisoner from prisoner by cell walls. In 'Dämmerung' the prisoner hears both his own breath and the movement of the warders: 'Dein Atem ist ein Ruf, ein einziger Ruf! [...] Es ist kein Ruf, der ihre Herzen träge'. The concept of individuation is conveyed in similar language, but it is significant that Toller considers it only in a secular context.

In the last of the three books which form his collection Rilke contemplates the place of the city in the eternal scheme of things:

Denn, Herr, die großen Städte sind
verlorene und aufgelöste;
wie Flucht vor Flammen ist die größte,-
und ist kein Trost, daß er sie tröste,
und ihre kleine Zeit verrinnt.¹³

Toller adapts this idea in 'Verweilen um Mitternacht':

Die alte Stadt fühlt hilflos die gewordne Zeit,
Sie beugt sich tief: sie ist bereit,
In Schoß der Quelle einzumünden.

Both poems describe the transitory nature of towns and therefore by implication of human achievement, in contrast with more lasting spiritual values.

Toller clearly read the Stunden-Buch very closely, for there are other textual similarities between the two collections, but such similarities as exist merely demonstrate the development and adaptation of a small number of the original ideas. Far more important is the spiritual framework which the collection supplied for Toller's prison experiences and the meditational structure which he followed in the Gedichte der Gefangenen.

3.2.3 Death

The most serious element of the experience of the prisoners is inevitably that of death. As revolutionaries, the prisoners had already faced death in the course of defending the Councils Republic. Many other revolutionaries had met their end in summary executions at the hands of the White troops who had recaptured Munich, and more were executed in short order in May 1919, as is described in 'Die Mauer der Erschossenen'. Even when the political atmosphere had calmed and the prisoners were in *Festungshaft*, the possibility of death was still ever-present, either through despair and resulting suicide or through cruelty and neglect by the prison authorities,

¹³ Ibid., p. 354.

as in the case of August Hagemeister, on the occasion of whose death Toller wrote Das Schwalbenbuch. Yet as shall be seen from a consideration of the two poems in this section, 'Der Gefangene und der Tod' and 'Ein Gefangener reicht dem Tod die Hand', such is Toller's strength of mind that he manages to re-evaluate death in order to produce a more positive perspective on yet another negative aspect of his incarceration.

The first poem, 'Der Gefangene und der Tod', takes the form of a dialogue between a prisoner afraid of death and death itself, in the form of a pair of sonnets. [GW II 314-315] The prisoner relates his fears in the first two strophes before revealing in the third that his principal concern is the destruction of the individual personality by death. Although the views of the death figure are far more interesting and complex, in the Gedichte der Gefangenen version each character is apportioned one complete sonnet. The disparity is corrected in the Lieder der Gefangenen version and to an even greater extent in a version which appeared in Das Dreieck in 1924.¹⁴ These versions will be compared in Chapter 5.

The death figure sees itself not as the antithesis of life but as an integral part of it. Clinging to life is merely a product of fear of the unknown, whereas death is a complement to life in the universe as a whole, and acceptance of death enhances the individual's integration into existence: 'Wer mich erträgt, der atmet wie versöhnt'. The world is a totality of forms and energies, continually changing their composition, and organic life is merely a part of this. The process is not a random recycling of matter either, for its aim is 'Vollendung', which is the 'Sinn' of the *Einer*, a pantheistic conception which Toller does not specify.

This view carries to their conclusion ideas raised in 'Pfade zur Welt' concerning the interlocking nature of all aspects of existence. These ideas persisted, as a letter to Netty Katzenstein of 14 March 1923 shows:

Und heute begreife ich nicht mehr, wenn Menschen Unterschiede machen zwischen lebendigen Wesen und toten Dingen, ich lächle über die Unterscheidung. Ich gehe so weit, zu behaupten, daß der Stein gerade so ein Herz hat wie der Mensch, wie das Tier, daß in der Schneeflocke grad so der Atem des Lebendigen wirkt wie in der Blume. [GW V 143-144]

This challenges the apparent division between organic and inorganic, which is addressed both in the poem and in the letter. The poem goes further though, and tries to calm the fears of the prisoner by suggesting that, as death is merely apparent, it is not anti-life. The poem does not indicate however the continuation of the human soul, more a kind of physical rather than metaphysical recycling.

¹⁴ Das Dreieck, 1 (1924/25), H. 4/5, p. 54.

As with many of the other poems in the Gedichte der Gefangenen there is an explicit secularisation of religious ideas. The original Judaeo-Christian conception is of death as the consequence of Original Sin, without which Adam and Eve would have been immortal. The death figure rejects this: 'Ein Märchen sprachen sie: der Tod sei in der Welt'. It is interesting that Toller should dismiss religious ideas as 'Märchen' when he had tried to use them to bring out munitions workers on strike in the earlier poem 'Legende', and this indicates a certain ambivalence in his attitude to organised religion.

The dialogue with death is a frequent feature of medieval literature, but there are also striking similarities here to Hugo von Hofmannsthal's short lyrical sketch Der Tor und der Tod (1893).¹⁵ On his deathbed the young aristocrat Claudio regrets that death has robbed him of the opportunity to have experienced life at a more direct level. In both works the figure of death is personalised, but whereas Claudio is a distinct individual character, Toller's prisoner is a representative type like the figures in his Expressionist dramas. Claudio's desire to experience life at a more emotional and instinctive level is echoed in the prisoner's fear of being deprived of such opportunity, 'mich Welterfüllten, / Deß trunkne Erdenlust nicht tausend Jahre stillten'. Claudio's reaction to the sight of the death figure is also similar: 'Wie packt mich sinnlos namenloses Grauen!'.¹⁶ But whereas death in Toller's poem has a positive regenerative function, Hofmannsthal's figure culls that which is ripe:

Wenn in der lauen Sommerabendfeier
Durch goldne Luft ein Blatt herangeschwebt,
Hat dich mein Wehen angeschauert,
Das traumhaft um die reifen Dinge webt;¹⁷

Der Tor und der Tod also shows considerable similarities to some parts of Die Wandlung, which strengthens the case that Toller was acquainted with the work. Claudio's soliloquy is similar to that of Friedrich in the first *Bild*:

[Am Fenster stehend]
Jetzt zünden sie die Lichter an und haben
In engen Wänden eine dumpfe Welt
Mit allen Rausch- und Tränengaben
Und was noch sonst ein Herz gefangenhält.

¹⁵ Hugo von Hofmannsthal, Der Tor und der Tod, in Gedichte und lyrische Dramen, ed. by Herbert Steiner, Freiburg/Reutlingen, 1970, pp. 199-220.

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 208.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

Sie sind einander herzlich nah
Und härmten sich um einen, der entfernt;¹⁸

Both Claudio and Friedrich are positioned at a window observing life and warmth being experienced by others. Claudio's perspective is that of an aristocrat desirous of breaking into the shared values of proletarian life, while Friedrich displays the feelings of an ethnic outcast. Like Friedrich and the subject of Toller's poem 'Der Ringende', Claudio believes that he still has a lonely path of experience to tread: 'Bin nie, von wahren Schmerz durchschüttert, / Die Straße einsam, schluchzend, nie! gezogen'.¹⁹ The idea of the *Wanderer* becomes clear if we think back to *Die Wandlung*. The figures of Friedrich, the *Wanderer* and death are constantly interchanged. Friedrich is someone who overcomes bitter wounds and through the death of his old persona comes to new life by accepting the entirety and cohesion of humanity. Through death he comes closer to *Vollendung*, and indeed the figure of the wanderer often signifies death. It is of course significant that Toller should let a lyrical drama influence his poetry. His own poetry affected his dramas and often turned them into lyrical dramas, wider in scope than those of Hofmannsthal, to be sure, but nonetheless similar in being *lyrisch durchzogen* and using characters emblematically.

Less theoretical and much more experiential in its approach towards death is 'Ein Gefangener reicht dem Tod die Hand'. [GW II 319-320] The alarm is raised as a result of a prisoner committing suicide, and Toller proceeds to speculate as to the reasons for his decision to take his own life. Once more, as in 'Gemeinsame Haft' and 'Besucher', the prisoners are described as startled animals kept in cages. The view of the warders is this time not so positive: their reaction to the cry of the prisoner committing suicide is to curse, for they are conditioned into not showing pity.

The reasons Toller suggests for the decision of the prisoner read like a list of the conditions described in the other poems in the *Gedichte der Gefangenen*. As in 'November' he mentions the passing of the years as a cause for desperation. The perpetual torment of 'die ruhelosen Schritte' remind us of the constant noise in 'Schlaflose Nacht' and look forward to the poem 'Über meiner Zelle' in *Vormorgen*. The walls, although inanimate objects, are imbued with quasi-human capabilities, such as being able to scorn, a far cry here from the execution wall in 'Die Mauer der

¹⁸ Ibid., p. 201.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 201.

Erschossenen': this is more like the doors out of which the faces of the dead emerge in 'Begegnung in der Zelle'. The final sentence, 'Daß wir frieren', is reminiscent of 'Aufwächst eise Helle' in 'Lied der Einsamkeit' and the pervasive feeling of cold in 'Schlaflose Nacht'.

Yet while we find a generally positive view of solitude in many of these poems, here we have a negative view of it as isolation. This is the factor which underpins all of the possible motivations for the prisoner's suicide, part of a systematic individuation promoted by the prison regime. The insularity of the individual and the impossibility of really getting to know someone else was a preoccupation of much Expressionist poetry. August Stramm in particular raised it to a compositional feature of his poetry by concentrating on *Ich* and *Du*. When he talks of 'Die Ströme Ich und Du', Toller acknowledges Stramm as he does in some of the war poetry in the Verse vom Friedhof. This insularity is connected with the loss of 'Weg': the failure to change social conditions outside and the unnatural individuation in prison have prevented natural contact between people. The path to the regaining of natural human relations is indicated in the final poem of the collection 'Unser Weg'.

The title of the current poem confirms the voluntary nature of this death, which is consonant with the more gentle and less threatening view of death in 'Der Gefangene und der Tod'. Death is a form of release, which in turn has implications for the intolerability of life in prison. Significantly the poem avoids blame: the questions recount the kind of personal and individualistic motivations which may lead to suicide, but this does not elicit any political anger. In fact the last part of the poem makes this suffering seem almost existential, and to this extent it can be moving but not subversive. When censoring his poetry, the prison authorities clearly did not realise this: they censored for the superficial reason that Toller revealed prison conditions, but by no means could the poetry be considered as inflammatory. There is a suggestion of understanding, if not forgiveness, in 'daß Menschenhände / Einander weh tun'.

Both structurally and linguistically the poem achieves a high degree of sophistication. The first strophe sets the scene very vividly, rapidly moving from the past to the present tense to accentuate the pace of events. The remaining three strophes contain the reflective speculation on the prisoner's motive for suicide. The six lines of rhetorical questions are followed by the simple 'Wir wissen's nicht'. The following statements are also simply expressed but quite profound in content. Considerable use is made of enjambment, even between strophes, to emphasise the connections between these speculations. Images such as 'leidverfilzt' and 'die wie

Leichenratten unsern Leib zernagen' are effective and well chosen. The striking phrase 'Daß keine Hilfebrücke überbrückt / Die Ströme Ich und Du' is an effective poetic rendering of a thought which Toller expressed in a letter to Netty Katzenstein in June 1920: 'Keine Brücke führt zum andern'. [GW V 27]

While these poems should reflect presumably the darkest hours of Toller's prison sentence, at no stage is there any suggestion that he himself contemplated suicide. Both poems are externalisations of the issues surrounding death. In a sense therefore both these two poems and the poems on solitude in the previous section can be seen as a healthy and positive means of coming to terms with what would otherwise be unacceptable aspects of prison realities. The poet has chosen the sonnet form to articulate the issues in a controlled manner, and the medium through which the problems have been articulated has in turn helped in the healthy adjustment to them.

3.2.4 The outside world

In three of the poems Toller turns his attention to the prisoner's relationship with the world outside. In 'Fabrikschornsteine am Vormorgen' and 'Wälder' he adopts the perspective of the prisoner looking out on the world and observing the restorative capacity of nature. 'Besucher' on the other hand depicts a visitor coming to the prison and observing how withdrawn his friend has become. [GW II 320] The inspiration for the poem may stem from a visit by his friend and most frequent correspondent Netty Katzenstein in August 1920. On 9 August he wrote to her of his anticipation of her visit but introduces a note of caution: 'Ich warte und hab Angst. Verstehst Du das?'. [GW V 31] To some extent he is concerned that she will find him in the agitated state he displayed during a previous visit when he was plagued by some of the more negative aspects of prison life. Yet he is also concerned at a growing apart arising from the diversity of their experiences. In a subsequent letter Katzenstein must have commented on how calm he had become, perhaps in such a way as to suggest introversion, for Toller picks up on this point in his letter of 18 August: 'Du hast wohl recht: ich war ruhiger'. He then goes on to explain that this passivity is part of a process of coming to terms with the barely tolerable nature of conditions in Niederschönenfeld: 'Denn die Krise der letzten Monate, grausam und quälend, führte mich zu notwendigen Klärungen'. [GW V 32] 'Besucher' is an attempt to demonstrate his understanding of the reaction of the visitor as well as to justify the change of mood of the prisoner.

The poem adopts at different points the perspectives of prisoner and visitor in order to emphasise the gulf between them, continuing the theme of individuation in 'Schlaflose Nacht' and 'Ein Gefangener reicht dem Tod die Hand'. So inimical is the prison environment to the visitor that he is described as the victim of predatory animals. Once more the prison walls are depicted as antagonistic, giving out their 'Haßschrei'. The second stanza introduces the prisoner, a friendly face in this violently hostile environment. The sorrow and pity of the visitor, clumsily compared to 'blauer Klang der Harfen', begin to pour out towards the prisoner. The process is halted abruptly by the change to a focus on the prisoner at the start of the third stanza, 'Der aber'. The surprise is that it is the prisoner who has changed rather than the visitor who inhabits the quickly-moving world outside. Attention returns to the feelings of the visitor in the final stanza, who leaves feeling cold, frequently associated in previous poems with isolation.

The prisoner's withdrawal into himself is a necessary strategy for adjustment to prison conditions, but the concomitant of this distancing is an inability to relate to others. He has achieved this by being 'entrückt dem Rhythmus kleinen Lebens', and this distance from the minutiae of everyday life enables him to find a deeper level of consciousness, 'an Gottes Quellen'. With the contrast in successive lines between the trivia of everyday life and proximity to God there is even a suggestion that such a life is superior to normal existence. This is suggested several times in the Briefe aus dem Gefängnis, and while we could interpret this as the making of a virtue from necessity, it is generally true that the most critically acclaimed and historically enduring examples of Toller's work were written in prison. The invocation of God is probably not meant as a suggestion of moral superiority but rather as a metaphor for the depth of the prisoner's experience. Equally the description of the visitor as 'Pilger', while effective in its own terms, may also have a specific reference given that the prison of Niederschönenfeld had been in earlier times a monastery.

While the relationship with other people became more difficult through the experience of prison, Toller's empathy with nature developed considerably. The poem 'Wälder' [GW II 310] describes his feelings on looking out of his cell window to a wood on the horizon, and he talks about this in a letter to Netty Katzenstein of 2 April 1921:

Ich schreibe an einem jener sehr stillen Frühlingsabende, die ein blasser Himmel umdämmt. Ich stand auf meinem Bett und blickte durchs Zellenfenster. Rot ruht die ungepflügte Scholle ... am Horizont ein Wald, bläulich verhangen [...]. [GW V 63]

The poem provides more than a mere contemplation of nature from the inside out. In the first three stanzas the shift of the poetic focus is announced by the initial word of each stanza, from the initial 'Ihr' to 'Ich' and back to 'Ihr'. As in 'Besucher' the poetic focus begins outside the prison, reverts to the prisoner and then re-extends to outside with a new perspective.

The grandeur of nature in its liberty is contrasted with images of the prisoner as a tortured, caged animal as in 'Gemeinsame Haft', only this time even such a wretched image is inadequate to express the waste of imprisonment. The unnaturalness of the prison environment and the manner in which it detracts from the individual are contrasted by the way in which nature magically enhances the free child. We have seen this enhancement in the idyllic setting of 'Abend am Welssee', where the youth complements his natural surroundings. The aching proximity of the woods deepens the deprivation of the prisoner.

There is considerable use of religious vocabulary and imagery: 'Dome [...] tröstet Leid [...] Psalmen eurer Seele'. The woods represent freedom, that is to say redemption or salvation from the pain of prison. Toller continues with the secular use of religious ideas, setting them here firmly in the context of nature as an object of veneration. Outside the prison it is the natural harmony of the environment which is stressed, trees being valued at least at the level of man. This re-evaluation of the status of natural phenomena is consonant with the development of his thought during this period and with the intentions of many poems, particularly 'Pfade zur Welt'.

As we have seen both in previous poems and from Die Wandlung, trees have an important emblematic function in Toller's poetry and other writing. They are always associated with a sense of belonging, so it is natural that the pine trees should be described as 'Melodie der Heimat'. In a letter to Netty Katzenstein in 1920 Toller recounts how, coming back over the fields to the prison accompanied by the warders, the sight of the trees reminds him of home:

Da war eine einsame Birke in der Ferne dieser Felder, mit zarten gebrechlichen Ästen.

Erinnern rührte mich. Die Landschaft war mir vertraut: so empfinde ich die Landschaft meiner Heimat. [GW V 22]

The trees in the poem evoke similar feelings of nostalgia to the extent that Toller wishes to be an integral part of the scene, 'umarmt vom tiefen Rauschen', and we are reminded of the line from 'Verweilen um Mitternacht', 'wer in der Erde wurzelt, rauscht'. As well as being reminiscent of home, the trees represent homecoming in a more fundamental sense.

This is a poem of longing, but this normally negative emotion is put to positive use, 'Minuten Schmerz der Haft bezwingend'. Once again by finding the format through which to express his darker feelings, Toller has produced a formulation which enables him to reconcile himself with his circumstances. The background to this contemplation is once more evening, which enables the liberation of deeply held emotions. It is the will of the poet which articulates them and channels them in a positive direction.

While there are clear biographical indicators for the genesis of 'Wälder', 'Fabrikschornsteine am Vormorgen' is much more difficult to place. [GW II 313] It does not appear at all to concern prison experience, and it is better to understand it as a poem written as part of a process of reminiscing about events which had taken place prior to entry into prison. The two quatrains build up an atmosphere of dread and suspense surrounding the factory chimneys. The language which expresses threat has an almost medieval ring to it, and the chimneys are 'gepanzert', parting the fog 'wie getriebener Keil'. Their challenge is expressed in terms of dominance and imprisonment. The captivity of the flames which power the factory suggest not only the imprisonment currently being undergone by the poet but also in more general terms industrial oppression under the capitalist system.

All of this power avails nothing against the enlightenment brought by morning. 'Vormorgen' here contains an ambiguity: in the specific context of the poem it is dawn, but it also suggests the time before a new tomorrow, when the repression represented by the factory chimneys will be swept away by a more humane organisation of society. In this society the chimneys, formerly so threatening, will be reduced to a nondescript grey in a world of colour and will be 'hilflos' and 'wie verloren'. Just as the trees in 'Wälder' represented the healthy organisation of society, the factory has an almost entirely negative connotation with Toller. In 'Der Heiland geht durch die Vorstadt' factories are part of the oppression which keeps the poor in inhuman conditions; in 'Soldaten' the war is depicted as a kind of factory process, with recruits going to the slaughter as it were on the production line; and in 'Abend am Bodensee' the smoke of the factories is connected with the death of comrades, either in a military or in a political context. With the dedication here to a shot comrade, the reference is clearly political.

Unlike some of the previous poems, particularly those in section 3.2.2, this poem demonstrates that night has a negative potential. Just as it can be a release for the prisoner's imagination, it can also allow fears and problems to take on disproportionate significance. In contrast, daylight in this context is a rational force which puts fear into perspective. Overall this is a poem of optimism and hope, for

the forces to be overcome are not as threatening as the current dark situation makes them appear to be, and the transformation of society represented by the arrival of the light is as inevitable as day following night.

In the final line a religious element is once more introduced into the poem. We are not meant here to understand the god of any specific religion but rather a pantheistic entity or the embodiment of the principles and patterns behind nature which Toller describes in 'Pfade zur Welt'. The final mood is that of the inevitable restorative capacity of nature, whatever man chooses to try to impose on it. This optimism about the restoration of the natural balance can also be found in the Verse vom Friedhof in Vormorgen. Toller's faith both in the continuation of the struggle to transform society and in victory for the forces of progress is clearly undiminished, and is given full expression in the final poem of the Gedichte der Gefangenen 'Unser Weg', to be considered in section 3.2.6.

3.2.5 Women in prison

Imprisonment brought with it total sexual abstinence, the effects of which have been examined in 'Schlaflose Nacht' and 'Lied der Einsamkeit'. In two poems in the Gedichte der Gefangenen, 'Schwangeres Mädchen auf dem Gefängnishof' and 'Gefangene Mädchen', Toller returns to his first direct poetic treatment of women since 'Studentinnen'. These poems will now be considered along with the question of the development of Toller's view of women and the effects of sexual abstinence on prisoners.

In 'Schwangeres Mädchen auf dem Gefängnishof' Toller seems to return to a conception and depiction of women which we would far more readily associate with the love poems from his adolescence, for the poem celebrates the pregnant woman in terms of her fertility. [GW II 316-317] The language used in the first two strophes is redolent with natural images and references to light and colour, as in early poems such as 'Umarmung'. There is the addition of a religious element in the description of her as 'ein Wunderkelch der gnadenreichen / Empfängnis', but the image is not pursued.

The quatrains celebrate the woman's fecundity in an elaborate manner, but the tercets bring the reader back to the context of prison, as Toller foresees the fate of the woman and her child. The baby is 'heimatlos' in more than one sense. Of course it is born away from home, but it is also born in an unnatural environment which could never provide a *Heimat*. From the very beginning the child has been denied the roots which Toller finds so important.

The evocation of fertility in the first two stanzas contrasts starkly with the alienation and frigidity of the concluding tercets. The vitality of 'Hyazinthen blühen' finds its echo in 'hinwelken', and the breasts, which at the start are part of the fertility of the natural surroundings, are at the end, though still full, a symbol of the waste and loss of childbirth in captivity and serve as a contrast.

'Gefangene Mädchen' depicts the movement of female prisoners around the exercise yard. [GW II 312-313] Most of the women would have been imprisoned for prostitution, hence the reference to 'kleine arme Dirnen', but Toller's treatment of them is sympathetic and asexual, the reference to 'Waisenkinder' pointing to a social reason for adopting the oldest profession. Material need is not the fault of the individual and should not therefore be punished by imprisonment.

Prostitution is described here in a harmless way, as a touching and slightly amusing spectacle. It is the observation by others which lends it a debased air: the poorly clothed orphan children are 'verschämt' at the glances others steal of their partial nakedness, and the female warders are there to ensure not that they do not escape so much as to make certain they do not express their sexuality. It is the attitudes that others bring to sexuality which make it seem debased, and Toller is suggesting that it is only right that these girls should want to show off their attractions. It is society which debases sensuality, and particularly in prison where no natural sexual expression is allowed.

As in 'Schwangeres Mädchen auf dem Gefängnishof' the female warders are described in a grim manner. There is something unnatural, even crippled about the movement of these girls in the prison yard. Their gait is described as 'schlürfen', their dress ('das härte Kleid') is designed to de-emphasise their natural sexuality and has overtones of moral disapproval and penitence, and their efforts to recapture their sensuality must be made 'heimlich'. In their natural environment these girls act with a mixture of shyness and bravado arising from insecurity. In prison they try to recreate this as a form of defiance to the warders and as an attempt to reassert their dignity. However, this act of defiance must take place against the background of their continued captivity.

The observation of the girls' coquetry may stem from an instance during a short stay at Neuburg prison in 1920 which Toller describes in a letter to Netty Katzenstein of 9 July 1920: 'Vom Zellenfenster aus sehe ich - nach langer Zeit wieder - [...] junge Mädchen, die selbst vor Zellenfenstern kokett sich in den Hüften wiegen'. [GW V 28] The last two lines of the poem may refer to an incident during Toller's period in Stadelheim prison awaiting trial in 1919. In a confiscated letter to Frau L. he tells the story of a woman serving a sentence for infanticide who exposes

herself to the male prisoners with the consequence that her early release is cancelled. Toller comments on this in the Briefe aus dem Gefängnis: 'Sie sagten einmal, daß die feinsten privaten Erlebnisse einen Hauch haben, der sie nur durch winzige Nüancen vom Banalen unterscheidet'. [GW V 18] He describes the incident with great dignity, and sees in it an attempt to address the natural needs of prisoners despite the unnatural separation and privation which prison imposes.

The damaging effect of sexual abstinence and repression on the prisoner is an issue which Toller continued to raise even after his release. In his travelogues Quer durch (1930) he was prompted to reflect on this aspect of his prison experience while visiting a Soviet men's prison. Discussing the concept of 'Urlaub' for prisoners when they would have the opportunity to experience normal relations once more he writes: 'Und wer erlebt hat, welche Qual jahrelanges Fernsein von Frauen jungen, gesunden Männern bringt, der ermißt die Bedeutung dieser Straferleichterung.'²⁰ In 1935 he was to write the introduction to a volume outlining sexual conditions in American prisons, and went into considerable detail concerning the effects of sexual abstinence on prisoners.²¹ Given the privations of prison life it is remarkable that Toller was able to deal with the question of women in prison in such a direct manner in the poems. It is quite possible that the poetic formulation of his reactions to these women, which required him to make the ideas acceptable to those outside prison who had normal access to sexual activity, in its turn shaped his own attitudes and helped to make this aspect of imprisonment more bearable.

It could be argued from the consideration of these two poems that Toller's understanding of women had barely progressed since his adolescence. There is still a curious mixture of idealisation, sexual desire from a distance and the valuing of women for their procreative capacities. Nonetheless under the most difficult of circumstances he had maintained a positive and generally respectful view of women, and in 'Gefangene Mädchen' indicates his understanding of prostitution as a matter of unnatural exploitation. When writing to Mathilde Wurm in 1922 he discussed the disparity between the ideologically correct treatment of women and deep-seated proletarian instincts: 'Oft sehe ich den Bruch zwischen sozialistischen Einsichten und traditionellem Empfinden'. [GW V 126] If we disregard briefly our more developed sensitivities and judge his views with historicity, it can be seen that he had a

²⁰ Toller, Quer durch, Berlin, 1930; the quote here is taken from the reprint, Heidelberg, 1978, p. 137.

²¹ In Joseph F. Fishman, Sex in prison, London, 1935, pp. v-xii and 1-2.

differentiated perspective on women in society at a time when they had barely been enfranchised in Britain. Later works written outside the constraints of imprisonment, especially Quer durch, show a very liberal and broadminded development in his thinking on these matters.

3.2.6 Release

Many times in the Briefe aus dem Gefängnis Toller ponders his reactions on release, the changes he feels prison may have wrought in him and the conditions he felt necessary in order successfully to readjust to his regained liberty. In a letter to Walter Fabian of 6 December 1923 he lists the things he is looking forward to on release, amongst them 'Wälder, Abende, Nächte, [...] Farben und Klänge'. [GW V 170] 'Entlassene Sträflinge' deals both with the joy and with the problems of readjustment of a prisoner who has just been released. [GW II 321-322] The date which Toller attributes to the poem places it after his release from military prison in spring or early summer 1918. It also marks the beginnings of a reconciliation with his mother which led eventually to a positive and supportive relationship. Before its inclusion in the Gedichte der Gefangenen it was published both in Die weißen Blätter and Der Weg in 1919.²²

The opening of the poem displays a dream-like quality: just as prisoners dream of release becoming a reality, the reality in turn takes on the quality of a dream. Toller uses the vocabulary of his earliest poetry, often suggesting self-deceptive states, and here it emphasises the fragility of the former prisoner's rehabilitation to the world outside. The imagery is redolent of Toller's early phase: colours, light, 'Blätterknospen, die im Frühlingsatem schwellen', the synaesthesia of 'tasten sie mit durstgen Blicken'. The successful integration of these early poetic techniques into these more sophisticated sonnets can also be found in 'Abend am Bodensee' and 'Abend am Welssee', discussed in section 3.1, supporting the dating of these latter poems between 1917 and 1919.

The prisoner goes through a resurgence as he is reborn into the world outside. The ecstasy is now 'irdisch' as he re-emerges into real life from the thought world of prison. The ex-prisoner's smile is still 'zerbrechlich' because he cannot quite believe

²² Toller, 'Entlassene Sträflinge', in Die weißen Blätter, 6 (1919), pp. 262-263 and in Der Weg, (1919), H. 5, p. 2. Both of these versions are identical to that in the Gedichte der Gefangenen apart from the inclusion of 'strahlend' before 'Lichtmeer' in the second line.

it is true and cannot assimilate the novelty of being free again - 'Form kann die Fülle noch nicht fassen'.

The man-made structures of the town intimidate the prisoner because they remind him of where he has just come from and prompt a return to introspection, 'tief in sich verklungen'. As in many other poems, especially perhaps 'Fabrikschornsteine am Vormorgen', the restorative power of nature is contrasted with the destructive tendency of those things created by man. The effect that the town has on the prisoner is reminiscent of one of the introductory pieces to the Gedichte der Gefangenen: 'Kamerad, in jeder Stadt, in jedem Dorf begleitet dich ein Gefängnis'. [GW II 304] This suggests an ambiguity: while the constrictions of the built environment are reminders of prison, the released prisoner also carries with him the marks of the experiences which make him view the town in this light.

The first line of the final stanza refers to the tendency of prison to enhance morbidity, to bring the prisoner closer to death and to cut him off from the life-related experience outside the prison. It removes a necessary and positive counterbalance by making the prisoner too introspective. Much of Toller's prison poetry lauds the potential of reflection in solitude: but isolation produces introspection, which is its negative excess. The reminder of prison leads him back to thoughts of death, but this is counterbalanced by the child who represents not just life but the prospect of shaping a future as yet untried. The difficulty in communication for a person isolated from normal human contact, portrayed graphically in 'Besucher', is conveyed here by the halting and hesitant manner in which the former prisoner caresses the child. Just as childhood involves the struggle for articulation, so the prisoner has to find his way to a means of expressing his feelings. The prospect of such expression he thought to be 'erloschen', so the poem ends on a hopeful note for the future.

'Unser Weg' is a statement of intent for Toller's life on release from prison, but it also seeks to rouse those to whom the Gedichte der Gefangenen had been addressed. [GW II 322] The poem is a tribute to Kurt Eisner, who led the Socialist Republic of Bavaria until his assassination in February 1919 and who, along with the ethical socialist Gustav Landauer, was an important influence on Toller's independent socialist thinking.

This poem is a political call to arms using as its axis the link between feudalism and capitalism. In this, religion and capitalism are equated as forms of oppression: both require working people to deny themselves the immediate and just rewards for their labours, and the Church in medieval times, just like the factory owners in the industrialised period, is the temporal beneficiary of this self-abnegation. Salvation for the monks was death-related, the feeling of closeness to God had to be

achieved either through 'Askese', the inflicting of torture or death itself. Political beliefs on the other hand are life-related and are urgent: 'Gebt uns Leben!'. As a result of their newly-acquired political awareness, the oppressed are no longer prepared to suffer in silence and not to make demands.

Despite his antagonism towards the idea of the deferral of salvation from the temporal, Toller borrows the language of traditional metaphysics in order to express it, as Vietta points out.²³ The 'Sakrament der Erde' has a direct connection with Nietzsche's Also sprach Zarathustra:

Der Übermensch ist der Sinn der Erde. Euer Wille sage: der Übermensch *sei* der Sinn der Erde!

Ich beschwöre euch, meine Brüder, *bleibt der Erde treu* und glaubt denen nicht, welche euch von überirdischen Hoffnungen reden! Giftmischer sind es, ob sie es wissen oder nicht.²⁴

While Toller might well have taken exception to some of the ends Zarathustra suggests, the wish to abandon the metaphysical as a palliative is strikingly similar.

Throughout the Gedichte der Gefangenen Toller has sought to describe the integral nature of all aspects of the world and to communicate his respect for all life. The contemplative dimension of prison life has enabled him to develop these ideas, which concern the recognition of the universal principle in all people, creatures and things. The poems were written during or shortly after the composition of Die Wandlung where, in the seventh *Bild*, Friedrich talks to his sister of the path that he must follow:

SCHWESTER

Dein Weg führt dich zu Gott.

FRIEDRICH

Haha, Gott am Dirigentenpult, den Reichen Konfetti zuwerfend.

SCHWESTER

Zu Gott, der Geist und Liebe und Kraft ist,

Zu Gott, der in der Menschheit lebt.

Dein Weg führt dich zu den Menschen. [GW II 40]

If the divine resides in people, then their temporal salvation is a way of serving God. Thus Toller is able to re-channel redemption ideas into a political path, to secularise Christian ideas. This is the explicit culmination of a tendency in many of the Gedichte der Gefangenen, and it enables Toller to accept the benefits of a

²³ Silvio Vietta (ed.), Lyrik des Expressionismus, Tübingen, 1976, pp. 217-218.

²⁴ Friedrich Nietzsche, Werke in drei Bänden, ed. by K. Schechta, Bd. 2, Munich, 1966, p. 279.

quasi-monastic life while maintaining the distance necessary to criticise specific aspects of organised religion.

The task of temporal salvation is not restricted to Germany, for Toller intends to bring 'Den Unterdrückten aller Länder Freiheit'. This internationalism is enhanced when in the second edition of the Gedichte der Gefangenen in 1923 he adds the introductory poem 'Widmung', addressed to all political prisoners who have struggled for the liberation of their fellow-countrymen.

3.2.7 Form, theme and function in the Gedichte der Gefangenen

It is easy to see why the collection begins with 'Schlaflose Nacht' and 'Durchsuchung und Fesselung', which hurl the reader into the threat and loneliness of incarceration. Equally, 'Entlassene Sträflinge' and 'Unser Weg' are the obvious choices to finish with, dealing with release and the resolve to return with undimmed commitment into society. One could be forgiven for believing that the remaining poems, containing a mixture of themes and preoccupations, were distributed at random. A letter to Netty Katzenstein of 12 September 1921, around the time of publication of the Gedichte der Gefangenen, suggests a rationale:

Liebe, das Gefängnis kennt Qualen, die wie ein Heer von Ratten in unseren Körper einziehen, sich dort einnisten, nagen, nagen, nagen. Und dann kommt plötzlich ein Mensch, der hat die wundersame Kraft des Rattenfängers von Hameln und seiner Melodie gehorchend, folgt das Heer von Ratten und verschwindet. [GW V 80]

Acclimatisation to the rigours of prison experience was not a smooth incremental process, but more an overall progression with frequent loops and setbacks.

If we step back from the poems we can see both aspects of this process. The collection begins with fear and violence, leading to deep loneliness; the consequent introversion leads to the beginnings of an appreciation of the opportunities for inner life, which is halted by an initial contact with death; the way back to the world is shown through nature, and this gives rise to metaphysical considerations; again, at a high point the prisoner loses hope and experiences the second contact with death but, after a reminder of the harshness of prison conditions, looks forward to release and a fresh beginning.

Similarly, certain themes are recurrent almost throughout and sometimes their treatment is affected by the extent to which Toller feels he has adapted at that particular time. Generally nightfall is seen as a positive time of day. As he explained in a letter of 12 December 1921, Toller found he worked better at night after the lights had gone out at 9 p.m. [GW V 84] Night hides the reality of the cell and

liberates the imagination. However, at times of fear or worry this potential can lead to increased anxiety. In a letter of 27 May 1923 he wrote to Netty Katzenstein of the fear that his mother's illness would prove fatal and that he would not see her alive again. Night then assumes the character of his fears:

Eine Nacht kriecht langsam heran, hüllt mich in die schwarzen Tücher der schweigenden Umarmung. Sanfte Tücher, die alle Spannung lösen. Dann aber starr werden, immer starrer, in einen Sarg sich wandeln, der zu eng ist, zu niedrig, der die Brust eindrückt, die Glieder bricht. -
Nacht unendlicher Folterungen. [GW V 148]

The potential of night is inherently neutral: what is decisive is the prisoner's own state of mind, and while to a certain extent this can be controlled by effort of will, there are times when external factors impinge on the process.

A consistently positive motif is that of nature, which is seen as the counterbalance to man's self-inflicted cruelty. In Das Schwalbenbuch the behaviour of the swallows was to become a paradigm of desirable human behaviour. The closer contemplation of that part of nature which he was able to observe led Toller to an appreciation of all levels not just of life but of all natural physical manifestations, even down to the inorganic. This gave rise both to a conviction of the equality of all levels of creation and a perception that there was a pattern or guiding principle which manifested itself in all things. If this principle could be termed God, then God necessarily resided in all things, and this emphasised the need for respect for all aspects of the environment.

This religiosity is rooted firmly in things as they are. If the physical world was self-contained, then a deferral of a better future could be seen as a betrayal of the here-and-now. At this point Toller distances himself explicitly from organised religion, but was aware that this was a considerable leap for many of his readers to make. In his efforts to make his views accessible to his readers he often employs Christian motifs, a powerful currency for all poets given their cultural significance. Toller's use of the language of religious ideas forms a bridge to a secular and more explicitly political world view.

This did not prevent him from viewing his isolation from the world as a monastic experience under the influence of his reading of Rilke's Stunden-Buch. While it enhanced a general sense of religiosity, it also enabled him to reach a level of concentration and intensity which would have been impossible outside the confines of prison. This intensity in its turn made possible a strength of will which permitted him to redefine prison as an opportunity for intellectual and artistic development. Writing to Netty Katzenstein in July 1920 he asked:

Ist mechanische Gewöhnung schuld, daß wir ein Gefängnis noch, in dem 'unsere' Arbeitszelle sich befindet, anschauen können wie eine Heimat? Ich weiß es nicht. Ich hatte das Gefühl, da ich wieder meine Zelle betrat, ich käme 'nach Hause'. [GW V 28]

It is Toller's achievement that he managed to transform prison into a creative environment by making use of reflections on his political failures and events from prison life to write creative works. In the same letter he writes: 'Wenn mich Erlebnisse gequält haben, treibt es mich, ein Drama zu schreiben, ein Werk zu bilden, wie im Fieber'. [GW V 29]

It is also in this letter that he praises the style of Matthias Claudius in a poem from the collection Der Wandsbecker Bote:

Es machte mich friedlich, glücklich. Gibt es viele Gedichte, die eine so schlichte Schönheit haben [...] ? Wird man nicht beim Lesen, wenn das Blut unruhig war, ganz still und zart und demütig? [...] Wie ein-fältig, ein-fach, wie schön, wie schön ist dieses Gedicht! Liebe, wenn nur nicht die Zweifel wären, daß Lücken da sind, die nicht da sein dürfen ... daß ich die Aufgaben nicht so erfüllen werde, wie ich es von mir verlange - es wäre der Zwiespalt in mir vielleicht überbrückt. [GW V 29-30]

Within the same letter Toller has described his uncontrolled creative urge, praised the simplicity (and by inference the control) of Claudius and described the 'Zwiespalt' in himself. The Gedichte der Gefangenen, and the reversion to the sonnet form which marks the immediately preceding period, are an attempt to address this 'Zwiespalt'. Toller gives the feeling of something undone, a skill still to be mastered and demonstrated: the combination of inspiration and formal control.

The Gedichte der Gefangenen address all aspects mentioned here. They are not a wild protest against prison conditions, in fact they leave a 'friedlich' impression. Despite the sadness described in some of the poems and a frequent air of melancholy, we are still left with a picture of Toller as being often 'glücklich'. The vocabulary of the Gedichte der Gefangenen is nowhere near as bombastic as the early Expressionist poetry, containing instead a 'schlichte Schönheit'. Nature figures prominently in the poems, and his attitude towards it and man's place in the cosmos is 'demütig'. Most of the poems indicate issues beyond themselves, but many are (almost) entirely self-contained, perhaps deceptively 'ein-fältig, ein-fach', for example 'Wälder', 'Begegnung in der Zelle' and 'Pfade zur Welt'.

The growing maturity of his poetic style is evident from the ease with which he is able to return to some of the conventions used in his earliest poetry and to embody them successfully in these sonnets. What had come across as rather precious in early poems such as 'Umarmung' gains depth and poignancy in the Gedichte der Gefangenen, such as the perception of natural harmony and the tendency to merge

sense impressions. Even after the publication of the collection these tendencies can be seen in his letters. When Netty Katzenstein sent him a bouquet of flowers, he replied in a letter of 27 April 1922: 'Ich saß stundenlang wunschlos vor den Blumen und lauschte ihrer Musik. Kennst Du das, daß Blumenfarben sein können wie Musik, daß Schauen Hören wird, und Duft Bild?'. [GW V 101] The more limited range of experience which prison provided deepened his response to individual instances or phenomena and allowed him to indicate their more general validity. This is after all the gift of the poet, and despite all of the tribulations which imprisonment imposed on him, Toller recognised that it was prison, 'Dieses schmerzliche Geschenk der Haft', which had helped enhance it in him.²⁵

²⁵ Letter to Netty Katzenstein of 4 October 1921. [GW V 78]

Chapter 4

Das Schwalbenbuch (1922-1924)

The publication of the Gedichte der Gefangenen marks a definitive end to Toller's experimentation with the sonnet form. It had provided him with discipline in two important senses. Firstly, he was able to demonstrate that he could communicate clearly in verse his experience of prison life without emotional over-indulgence, and secondly, he had regained the control over the formal aspects of his poetry, which had been lacking in the lengthy and over-ambitious poems of his early Expressionist period.

Even while writing a sonnet cycle, there was an underlying creative anarchy which prevented slavish adherence to the stricter dictates of the discipline, as one contemporary reviewer noted:

Alexandriner werden die Nase rümpfen: Toller geht ziemlich selbstherrlich mit Versmaß und Reim um, er vermeidet dafür aber auch alle Sprachverrenkungen um der starren Form willen und bewahrt den Zyklus vor der bleiernen Eintönigkeit, die den peinlich nach akademischen Regeln gebauten Sonettenfolgen meist eignet.¹

The fundamental vitality and exuberance of Toller's verse made a return to a freer style almost inevitable. In its diversity Das Schwalbenbuch documents the unleashing of Toller's poetic energies, while the collection Vormorgen demonstrates sureness of touch, rich suggestivity of language and a deft manipulation of form to his poetic ends.

Das Schwalbenbuch is the work with which a casual reader of Toller's poetry is most likely to be acquainted, and is the most commercially successful of Toller's poetic works. It was published in the first half of 1924 with an initial impression of 5,000 copies. By 1929 a third edition had gone into a second impression bringing the total number of copies to 30,000. In 1957 the Insel-Verlag in the GDR published a fourth edition of 10,000 copies. Since then the poem has been reprinted in its entirety in the three major collections of Toller's work, the Ausgewählte Schriften (GDR, 1959), the Prosa Briefe Dramen Gedichte (FRG, 1961) and the Gesammelte Werke (FRG, 1978). Along with its success in terms of publication the poem has received more critical attention than any other of his poetic works, although even this falls far short of the quantity of critical attention bestowed on his early dramas. The secondary literature on Das Schwalbenbuch will be reviewed in section 4.3.

¹ Paul Mochmann, 'Drei Arbeiterdichter', Die Glocke, 8. Jg., 1 (1922), p. 249.

In his admirable bibliography of Toller's work and its secondary literature Spalek details the various editions and impressions of Das Schwalbenbuch before concluding of the third edition (21-25,000, 1927) that it 'must be considered the authoritative edition of the work'.² This assertion is based on the fact that the publication of the third edition was Toller's first opportunity to revise the text unrestricted by prison confiscation and censorship, and that this led to numerous typographical, textual and layout changes. To this extent, the third edition was Toller's considered form for Das Schwalbenbuch and thus authoritative. Our purpose however is to examine Das Schwalbenbuch in relation to the experiences which gave rise to it and the circumstances under which it was written, and thus we shall refer to the first edition. Quotations will be taken from the version in the GW, which is that of the second impression, for the body of the text is identical to the first impression apart from the correction of some minor textual and typographical errors. The epilogue to Das Schwalbenbuch which first appeared in the second edition (fourth impression) is reprinted in a bibliographical appendix to the second volume of the GW.

4.1 The Schwalbenbuch as a document of experience

The events of the poem are easy enough to relate. As a result of the death of a friend and fellow-inmate, Toller's thoughts turn to death as a release from the loneliness and desolation of prison life. As he sinks into morbid reverie, the arrival of a pair of swallows jerks him back to life, and in his eagerness to hold on to their vitality he unsuccessfully attempts to entrap them before realising that he would be inflicting upon them his own experience of incarceration. The swallows remain with him despite this attempt, building a nest and laying a clutch of eggs. The uninhibited grace of the swallows forms a basis for Toller to examine the degenerate aspects of civilised society, and the rescue of a sparrow from a sparrow-hawk by a flock of swallows provides a model for a human *Gemeinschaft* and for resistance to oppression. The need to feed their newly-hatched young with insects allows Toller to examine the difference between existential necessity and wanton cruelty, and he grieves with the parents at the death of their second brood. As the swallows gather for their winter migration, he reflects on the lesson in real humanity which these animals have taught him and, with a new equanimity towards his own imprisonment

² John M. Spalek, Ernst Toller and his critics: a bibliography, Charlottesville, 1968, p. 69.

and a revitalised attitude towards his own world, he looks forward to their return the following summer.

On the title pages Toller describes its genesis as 'Gewachsen 1922. Geschrieben 1923'. [GW II 323] Although this is a broadly accurate description of its formulation and writing, Toller records in the Briefe aus dem Gefängnis experiences with swallows throughout the period from 1921 to 1924. Furthermore the chain of experiences and reflections depicted in Das Schwalbenbuch is not that documented in the prison letters, although admittedly the latter cannot be taken necessarily as a chronologically precise record of Toller's incarceration. In essence Toller crystallises out key events and ideas from this time and arranges them to greatest effect in Das Schwalbenbuch.

The first mention of the swallows in a letter to Netty Katzenstein of 18 May 1921 coincides with a low point in his mood, physical health and creativity. Above all he experiences 'einen Verfall [...] der Kraft der sinnlichen Reaktibilität (wenn ich mit diesem Wort die Kraft, sinnliche Eindrücke leidenschaftlich wiederzuempfinden, bezeichnen darf.)'. [GW V 66] This conjunction is important because, while the experience of the swallows altered his views of social change and helped to reconcile him to the restrictions of prison, it also lent a new impetus to his poetry by providing an expansive, extended metaphor for him to combine his developing feel for language with the control gained from the writing of the sonnet cycle Gedichte der Gefangenen.

By 20 March the following year Toller had once more been thrust into a deep depression which he relates again in a letter to Katzenstein. The mood and language are evocative of the opening strophes of Das Schwalbenbuch. The bars of the cell have become a condition of his life and perceptions: 'Das Gitter am Fenster, was tuts. Doch ein anderes Gitter wächst, das Gitter zwischen Seele und Welt. Wird es je wieder fallen?' [GW V 98] This feeling is re-expressed in Das Schwalbenbuch thus:

Nun wachsen sie in Deinen Augen,
Und wohin Du blickst,
Überall
Überall siehst Du Gitterstäbe. [GW II 325]

The feeling of purposelessness at the start of the poem is addressed at the end of the letter: 'Wozu? Wohin? Ich habe ein tiefes, tiefes Heimweh. Und das Heim heißt: Nichts.' [GW V 99]

In the June of this year Toller applied for permission for a visit by Katzenstein, but his ecstasy at the prospect was dashed by an official rejection. In his recuperation from the ensuing depression he mentions the crucial role of the swallows who have come to inhabit his cell: 'Ich bin nicht allein - immer sind Schwalben um

mich. Es ist gut zu wissen, daß nicht alle Bewohner der Zelle gefangen sind. Fröhlich macht dieses Wissen.' [GW V 106] Although August Hagemeister, whose death is referred to at the start of the poem, was not to die until the January of the following year, the swallows perform here the function attributed to them at the beginning of Das Schwalbenbuch, namely that of arousing the prisoner from morbid depression.

In another letter from 1922 placed in the Briefe aus dem Gefängnis after the letter quoted above, Toller writes to a female reader who is intending to start a career in caring for young people. He exhorts her to display patient love even to the most difficult children: 'Daß soziale Jugendfürsorge nur ein Ersatz ist, haben Sie recht erkannt. Darum müssen wir das eine tun und das andere nicht lassen: Für eine hellere Gemeinschaft kämpfen.' [GW V 109] Toller accepts the necessity for caring social institutions while describing their limitation without the element of love, of the recognition and acceptance of common humanity. This mixture of compromise with reality and undimmed idealism is characteristic not just of Das Schwalbenbuch but also of the dramas which predated and followed it, Die Maschinenstürmer and Hinkemann respectively.

The news that the young swallows have taken wing is imparted in an undated letter in the Briefe aus dem Gefängnis placed immediately prior to a letter to Katzenstein of 25 July 1922, relating the news that an amnesty for political prisoners has not been extended to Bavaria. Toller states that he has regained his wonted strength and composure, and the juxtaposition with the previous short letter implies that the vitality and irrepressibility of the swallows may have helped him in this process. By mid-August a second clutch of eggs had hatched, and the attentiveness of the parents to the needs of their young prompts him to reflect on human arrogance concerning social organisation amongst animals: 'Und es gibt Menschen, die leugnen das soziale Apriori in der Tier- und Menschenwelt. Tier-Mensch, eine Nüance, nicht mehr.' [GW II 112] Human sophistication has led to a denial of the innate social principle, and animals, untrammelled by the clutter of cultural sophistication, practise this principle as a matter of instinct.

This simplicity and directness of feeling is also evident in the grief of the parents over the death of the second brood of young swallows at the end of August 1922. Toller himself has gained this immediacy of rapport, as he writes to Katzenstein on 25 August:

Auch mir fehlen die Jungen, auch ich bin traurig um sie. Ihr Zwitschern war Wärme, war Nähe der Welt. Es ist sehr einsam jetzt tagsüber in meiner Zelle.
- [...] Ein Tag gleicht dem anderen, die Zeit ist tot. [GW V 114]

With the withdrawal of the parents into their sorrow and the absence of the young, Toller is beginning to habituate himself to their inevitable departure. On 15 September he writes of the growing cold but also of his reluctance to close the window, thus running the risk of losing the swallows who are 'das einzig Tröstliche'. [GW V 129] At the end of September they departed, leaving him with a mixture of longing and warm memories, as he writes on 26 October: 'Meine Schwalben, die vor einem Monat mich verlassen haben, waren schöner [als Menschen]. Und ich fühlte mich ihnen vertrauter und näher, als den meisten, die "ein Zwang" zusammenhält.' [GW V 132]

While 1922 provided many of the most important stimuli for the content of Das Schwalbenbuch, 1923 was to bring the event which prompted its writing, namely the death of August Hagemeister. Involved only to a tangential degree in the Councils Republic, Hagemeister had been sentenced to ten years in *Festungshaft*. At the start of January 1923 he began to suffer a series of heart attacks, initially ignored by the prison administration but subsequently diagnosed by the unsympathetic prison doctor firstly as a cold and then as pleurisy. Appeals on his behalf to move him to medical facilities were rejected and he died alone on 16 January in a cell removed from the other prisoners. This negligent and arbitrary death embodied the worst of the prisoners' fears and shook even their warders. The poet Erich Mühsam was closely involved in the episode and was prompted to write a poem on Hagemeister, one of the very few reflecting his experiences in prison.³ The prisoners were allowed to take their leave of Hagemeister, and Toller describes in the Briefe aus dem Gefängnis how he lays some laurel twigs in his lap: '[...] und so verband uns der Gruß in der frierenden Verlassenheit des Todes. Verfinstert sind die wachen Tage, verfinstert die träumenden Nächte.' [GW V 137] Mood and diction are similar to those at the beginning of Das Schwalbenbuch: 'Es brennt, es brennt ein tiefes Weh. / Verlassenheit'. [GW II 325]

It is not until 30 June that Toller mentions that the swallows had returned, but by 29 July he writes to Katzenstein that he is working on Das Schwalbenbuch and that it is evolving without effort 'nach seinen eigenen Gesetzen'. [GW V 161] The work fuses together the positive experience of the swallows in 1922 with the feelings of fear of 1923. In a sense its writing is a form of therapy, and we return to our conclusions regarding previous works: the articulation of his experiences in a controlled and communicative form enables Toller to return with fresh insights and renewed

³ Erich Mühsam, 'August Hagemeister', Gedichte, ed. by Günther Emig, Berlin, 1983, p. 346.

confidence to the challenge of those initial experiences. The vital personal aspect of Das Schwalbenbuch for Toller is the comparison between the prisoner's morbid and defeatist mood at the start of the poem and his regained vitality and self-assurance at the end. In this sense its genesis has indeed occurred 'nach seinen eigenen Gesetzen', these being those psychological mechanisms necessary for the prisoner to adjust successfully to the tribulations of the prison environment.

The death of August Hagemeister was not the only controversy surrounding the writing of the Schwalbenbuch. On 15 September 1923 Toller writes to Katzenstein that he is sending her a copy of the poem. The following letter in the Briefe aus dem Gefängnis is dated 19 September and is written to Paul Löbe, President of the Reichstag, complaining that the prison authorities had confiscated two copies of the poem intended for friends and one for his publisher Gustav Kiepenheuer. Hoffmann, the governor of Niederschönenfeld, had justified his decision by describing the work as provocative and agitational. Part of Toller's anger in this stems from the arrogance and arbitrariness of the decision, but there is also a deeper frustration that 'ein Werk von mir, das ich zu meinen reifsten zähle' has been suppressed. [GW V 164] The work's extended period of gestation and the speed of its writing support Toller's conviction of its quality. Löbe replies two days later that he will be proposing and supporting Toller's petition for its release on the grounds that as an *Ehrenhäftling* he is entitled to free artistic expression. In a rare direct editorial intrusion into the prison letters, Toller notes sardonically: 'Die Eingabe wurde niemals im Reichstag behandelt'.⁴

The prison authorities gave vent to their resentment by moving him to a west-facing cell where the swallows would not nest and by destroying any subsequent attempts by the swallows to build a home. The story of the so-called *Schwalbenkrieg* was appended to the fourth impression of Das Schwalbenbuch in 1924 (16-20,000) and to all subsequent editions. The frustration of the breeding plans of the swallows by the prison authorities forms a bitter comment on the humanity of the animal kingdom and on the relative inhumanity of human society: 'Bald kam das Schwalbenmännchen allein. Die Schwälbinnen waren gestorben, wohl weil die Menschen ihr wehrten, fruchtschwere Eier zu bergen.' [GW II 359]

⁴ GW V 165. This assertion is not supported by Ernst Niekisch in his review of Das Schwalbenbuch, who states that a committee of the Reichstag dealt with the petition but postponed a decision for fear of Bavaria's reaction. Ernst Niekisch, 'Tollers "Schwalbenbuch"', Die Glocke, 9. Jg., II (1923/24), pp. 790-794, here p. 791.

4.2 The natural order and human society

The fundamental contrast in Das Schwalbenbuch is between on the one hand human ideas, attitudes and social organisation and on the other the harmony of the natural world as exemplified by the swallows. Their paradigmatic function is both a criticism of human society as it has come to be and a model of the *Gemeinschaft* to which humanity could aspire. Toller excludes himself specifically from the category of humanity, identifying himself with the swallows both on a personal and an instinctive level, for example through the sympathy he displays, and by drawing an explicit parallel between the poet and the swallows, triggered by the mention of Hölderlin. He then continues:

Den Dichtern gleicht Ihr, meine Schwalben.
Leidend am Menschen, lieben sie ihn mit nie erlöschender Inbrunst,
Sie, die den Sternen, den Steinen, den Stürmen tiefer verbrüdet sind als
jeglicher Menschheit. [GW II 329]

Both poets and swallows are observers of human behaviour, both are positively inclined and trusting yet constantly disappointed and rejected by the arbitrariness and cruelty of human actions. There is also a distance between the poets and swallows and the generality of humanity which arises from the latter's choice to remove itself from a less sophisticated and more natural existence. Poets and swallows have a more direct relationship with the reality of existence, the former through their sensitivity and the latter through their uncomplicated animal nature and their unselfconscious integration in the overall scheme of things.

Humanity however has placed barriers between itself and acceptance of its *Tiersein* for fear of the self-knowledge this would bring:

Eure Lebensangst
Ankurbelt Autos der Selbstflucht,
Illuminiert
Die Seele
Mit Lampions elektrischer Gier
Und wähnt:
Sie sei geborgen.

[...]

All Euer Lärm, Euer Gekreisch, Euer Gekrächz, Euer Freudeplakatieren,
Lustigsindwir -
Hahaha -
Übertönt nicht
Das leise kratzende
Nagen

Der drei heimlichen Ratten

Leere

Furcht

Verlassenheit [GW II 337-338]

The fear of the void which humanity has created arises from a flight from its communality with the rest of existence. Fascination with technology, nationalism and the sophistication of society are all self-reinforcing constructs which have formed impediments to this acceptance, and which retard man's understanding of his place in existence of which Toller, as a poet, is aware:

Ich bin nicht allein.

Auch Mond und Sterne sind mir Gefährten

Und die schimmernden schweigenden Felder. [GW II 337]

This line of thinking can be traced back to Toller's recognition of the reality of common humanity in 'Leichen im Priesterwald' and to the pantheistic element of 'Pfade zur Welt' in the Gedichte der Gefangenen.

This conception of the ills of human society also has implications for Toller's political thinking. Any meaningful change in social organisation must embody the principles outlined in Das Schwalbenbuch. The political struggle in which he had until then been engaged needed reconsideration. Political parties used morally questionable means to gain power in society, seeking in the process an amelioration of social and working conditions. Das Schwalbenbuch argues that the materialist goals of established politics, and perhaps of human endeavour in general, are in themselves obstacles to human happiness. If this is to be defined as an acceptance of the communality of existence and awareness of one's place in the wider order, then a mere material improvement of the human condition could actually defer these recognitions.

The development of this line of thought can be seen from other works written during this time in his imprisonment. Die Maschinenstürmer, written in 1922, probably just before the arrival of the swallows in his cell, proposes these views through the speeches of Jimmy Cobbett, which advocate politically radical but nonetheless humane and liberal solutions to the situation of factory workers facing redundancy as a consequence of mechanisation. The conflict between Cobbett and John Wible, who proposes sabotage and insurrection, looks back to the debate of humane revolution versus political necessity in Die Wandlung and Masse Mensch. The debate however has a new dimension here: whereas in the earlier plays the political goals were common to both sides and it was political method at issue, in Die Maschinenstürmer both means and ends are at variance. Wible sees technology as the enemy and wishes a return to the individuation of home-based artisan weaving; Cobbett, who clearly has Toller's dramatic sympathies, argues that technology *per se*

is not the most salient issue, and that the fundamental questions are its ownership and the kind of community in which labour takes place. His arguments and the language he uses are reminiscent of the way in which Toller defines the positive aspects of the swallows' community: '*Eure Schuld ist, daß [...] ihr nicht Gemeinschaft lebt [...]* Und doch ist Traum in euch [...] vom Land der werkverbundenen Menschheit.' [GW II 142, italics in the original]

After this critique of the workers' conception of a future society, Cobbett explains that it is the workers' separation from an intimate understanding of their mutuality and of their place in the natural order which prevents them from visualising this: 'Fragst du nach Sinn? ... Ich bin ... du bist ... wir sind [...] Den Sinn, den gibt der Mensch dem Leben.' [GW II 149] In his debate with the factory-owner Ure over the natural organisation of society, Cobbett argues that mutual help amongst animals is the predominant feature of the natural world rather than survival of the fittest and the predatory instinct. Before he is killed by the frenzied Luddite mob, Cobbett criticises the workers' acceptance of the necessity of power structures and leaders, and their ignorance of 'Den Menschheitsbund der freien Völker'. Until they alter this fundamental conception, they will remain 'Knechte bis ans Ende aller Tage'. [GW II 187]

This final almost defeatist point concerning the conventions of political struggle may have arisen from Toller's perception of the fortunes of the USPD at this time. His own often substantial commitment to the party began to wane as the party suffered haemorrhages of members to right and left in the period between 1920 and 1922 and, after his resignation from the party in 1924, he was to pour his energies into political campaigns rather than party work. The writing of Das Schwalbenbuch, which gives glimpses of his state of mind, took place in 1923 along with the writing of the play Hinkemann. In a letter of 13 June 1923 Toller wrote to Stefan Zweig of the play: 'Ich habe das Werk in einer Zeit geschrieben, in der ich, schmerzhaft, die tragische Grenze aller Glücksmöglichkeiten sozialer Revolution erkannte.' [GW V 152] To his view of political movements as essentially flawed, Toller now adds the further limitation that political forms of society based on their principles are unable to help all members of that society: 'Immer wird es Individuen geben, deren Leid unlösbar ist.' [Ibid.] He is careful though not to lapse into political pessimism:

Das Absolut-Gute, das 'Paradies auf Erden', wird kein Gesellschaftssystem schaffen, es handelt sich einzig darum, für das relativ beste, das der Mensch finden und verwirklichen kann, zu kämpfen. [GW V 153]

While this may be the view that the author had come to, he nonetheless parodies the idea of a materialist solution to social problems as a panacea in the figure of Michel

Unbeschwert in Hinkemann: 'eine vernünftige Menschheit produziert ein glückliches Dasein'. [GW II 216]

The structure and argument of the play support instead Hinkemann's own conception of social revolution and of the possibility of temporal salvation:

Ein Geist sind wir, ein Leib. Und es gibt Menschen, die sehen das nicht.
Und es gibt Menschen, die haben das vergessen. [...]

Wie ist das sinnlos! Machen sich arm und könnten reich sein und brauchten
keine himmlische Erlösung ... die Verblendeten! [GW II 246]

This pessimistic view of the inability of society fundamentally to change its form as a result of people's alienation from the recognition of their common humanity is fundamental to Das Schwalbenbuch. It is not without its significance either that Hinkemann's own recognition of this is stimulated by his horror at the treatment of animals, firstly when his mother blinds her goldfinch in the hope that it will improve its singing, and secondly when his own economic circumstances and his desire to retain the love of his wife Grete oblige him to perform in a circus biting through the necks of live rats and mice.

As Hinkemann points out, the change must come initially from within people: 'Wie müßt ihr anders werden, um eine neue Gesellschaft zu bauen.' [GW II 225] Expressed in these terms, Toller's preconditions for social change would not seem to differ from those postulated in Die Wandlung, where Friedrich preaches the gospel of the new *Mensch* in quasi-Nietzschean terms:

Ihr seid alle keine Menschen mehr, seid Zerrbilder euer selbst. Und ihr könntet doch Menschen sein, wenn ihr den Glauben an euch und den Menschen hättet, wenn ihr Erfüllte wäret im Geist. [GW II 60]

The process of becoming a *Mensch* certainly includes an element of the recognition of common humanity, but there is also in Die Wandlung an emphasis on a destiny particular to humanity which differentiates it from the world around it. Humanity is in effect attributed a category apart from the rest of creation, and herein lies the crucial difference between the programme for human fulfilment in Die Wandlung and that in Das Schwalbenbuch (and by extension in Die Maschinenstürmer and Hinkemann): in the latter works humanity must humble rather than exalt itself, because people have lost touch not just with their common humanity but also with their place in the universe. The final strophe of Das Schwalbenbuch makes clear the lessons to be drawn from the swallows:

Bevor die Menschen nicht wiederfinden den Grund ihrer Tierheit,
Bevor sie nicht sind
Sind
Wird ihr Kampf nur wert sein
Neuen Kampfes,

Und noch ihre heiligste Wandlung
Wird wert sein neuer Wandlung. [GW II 350]

The explicit distancing from the human optimism of his first drama is underlined by the emphasis of its title both in the penultimate line and as the final word. Toller has in effect set a second precondition to lasting human development, a requirement of humility as to one's place in the overall scheme of things. It is unlikely that he would have come to this requirement had it not been for the powerlessness and humiliations inflicted on him as a prisoner.

A consistent strand of thinking from the Gedichte der Gefangenen to Das Schwalbenbuch is the use of prison itself as a metaphor for human existence. It is true that the prisoner, on emerging from incarceration, will find it hard to remove prison bars from his sight, in other words to recover from the experience:

Nun wachsen sie in Deinen Augen,
Und wohin Du blickst,
Überall
Überall siehst Du Gitterstäbe. [GW II 325]

The constraints of human life however are less easy to escape. The poem suggests these as it progresses, many familiar from the prison sonnets: social relationships, political action, capitalism, religion, culture, technology, and so on. The physically incarcerated prisoner who is sensitised to the social, political and cultural diversions from an understanding of mutual humanity and of one's place in the scheme of things is paradoxically more at liberty than the free man immersed in society's conventions and assumptions.

In the underlying conception of the interconnectedness of all elements of existence Toller is being consistent with a metaphysical line of thinking begun in the Gedichte der Gefangenen, particularly in 'Pfade zur Welt'. These personal metaphysics never find expression as part of a clearly-stated and coherent system of beliefs, and they are only to be found in any significant measure in Toller's poetry. Other more overtly rational modes of writing would require more rigorous exposition, and thus poetry was the ideal vehicle for these ideas because it describes by use of allegory, symbol, metaphor and image, all devices appropriate for the communication of ideas which are deeply held and felt, but explicable only with the utmost difficulty.

The final enjoinder to man to recapture his 'Tiersein' is the culmination of the view of man as an animal who has lost his way. The man-made conventions for the regulation of human intercourse divide rather than bind society: prison itself and the 'Paragraphen' which govern it are an exercise in individuation, and in a similar way the externals of culture and economic development are degenerate manifestations of human community. Even the animals themselves, though acting as models of social

organisation, are further away from complete integration into the fabric of existence than inanimate objects:

Das Tier ist heiliger als der Mensch. Amen.
Die Blume heiliger als das Tier. Amen.
Erde heiliger als die Blume. Amen
Aber am heiligsten der Stein. Sela. Sela. Sela. [GW II 336]

As this order unfolds, the language becomes progressively more stark, verbless and uncluttered with articles. The language thus complements the progression being described as well as demonstrating the irrelevance of the sophistication of language to it. The process culminates in a religious chant, a ritual form of language designed to facilitate direct communion with the Creator.

The inverted significance of these levels of existence compared to our preconceived notions is in an even more stark progression than that indicated in 'Pfade zur Welt':

Ein Grashalm offenbart des Kosmos reiche Fülle,
Die welke Blume rührt uns wie ein krankes Kind,
Der bunte Kot der Vögel ist nur eine Hülle
Des namenlosen Alls, dem wir verwoben sind. [GW II 316]

The fact that this sonnet survived unchanged from the Gedichte der Gefangenen to the Lieder der Gefangenen in Vormorgen, unlike the vast majority of the others, implies that Toller was still satisfied three years later not just with its poetic but also with its conceptual validity. To this extent Das Schwalbenbuch is a development of those ideas from the previous poems which Toller considered most true.

The understanding of the underlying pattern of existence which manifests itself in varying ways in different parts of creation is not, in Toller's view, accessible purely through human reason. If anything, human reason's assumptions of superiority form a barrier to this access. In order to achieve direct contact humanity must achieve a state in which it detaches itself from the norms of human awareness:

Nur im Tanze brecht Ihr die Fessel,
Nur im Tanze umrauscht Ihr die Sterne,
Nur im Tanze ruht Ihr im Göttlichen,
Tanzet! Tanzet!

Im Tanze träumt das heilige Lied der Welt. [GW II 328]

The immediate image which comes to mind is that of ritual dancers, who transpose themselves into a dreamlike trance in order to remove the barrier with the divine. Toller represents dance as an activity in which one lays aside normal conventions of movement and contact and attempts, with differing degrees of success, to open oneself to the natural rhythm suggested by one's limbs.

The other state in which the human could achieve communion with the *namenloses All* is in dreams. There is here a long philosophical tradition of the mistrust of the conscious state as distorting the ideal reality of existence. This played a significant role in the thought of Nietzsche, whose influence can be seen in some of Toller's poems and thinking. Human understanding can only be achieved by way of analogy with the essence of underlying reality, and this is implicit in Toller's use of the swallows to indicate the ideals of human organisation. Their 'Tiersein' is *unnennbar* because language is not just inadequate to describe reality but is actually a barrier against it.

4.3 Secondary literature on Das Schwalbenbuch

Untypically for Toller's poetic work Das Schwalbenbuch has stimulated a certain amount of critical attention apart from contemporary reviews, which are generally descriptive of it and which place it firmly in the context of his imprisonment.⁵ An essay by the GDR critic Martin Reso on Toller's poetry in 1961 was followed over a decade later by a short section in Christine Cosentino's book Tierbilder in der Lyrik des Expressionismus. Malcolm Pittock dedicates one chapter to the poetry in his book on Toller, a section of which deals with Das Schwalbenbuch, and in 1986 in his book Revolutionary socialism in the work of Ernst Toller Richard Dove included a short section on the poem.⁶ We shall look first in detail at Reso's article before examining the subsequent contributions.⁷

The first third of Reso's article is taken up with an attack on Toller's lack of class consciousness and of an awareness of the necessity for class struggle. He then describes the Gedichte der Gefangenen as the poetic depiction of individuation without any perspective which would enable collective action. Against this collection he sets

⁵ A good example is the review of Niekisch, who focuses on the so-called 'Schwalbenkrieg' and its implications for relations between the Reichstag and Bavaria. Ibid., pp. 790-794.

⁶ Martin Reso, 'Gefängnisserlebnis und dichterische Widerspiegelung', op. cit.; Christine Cosentino, Tierbilder in der Lyrik des Expressionismus, Bonn, 1972, pp. 114-119; Pittock, op. cit., pp. 157-161; Dove, Revolutionary Socialism, op. cit., pp. 256-260.

⁷ Reso's article followed his unpublished doctoral dissertation, 'Der gesellschaftlich-ethische Protest im dichterischen Werk Ernst Tollers', Jena, 1957.

Das Schwalbenbuch as an optimistic opening up to the world and a move away from introspection. In doing this, Reso ignores the many positive aspects of the Gedichte der Gefangenen and its relation to Das Schwalbenbuch, which is summative both of the positive and of the negative themes in the prison sonnets. Because it is based on a subjective preference for Das Schwalbenbuch over the Gedichte der Gefangenen, Reso's attempt to deal with the two works antithetically falls down when he tries to define that which is particular to Toller's poetry:

Der Dichter scheut sich nicht, seine Gedanken und Empfindungen preiszugeben, sie naiv-sentimental auszusprechen, um in so subjektiver Widerspiegelung etwas Allgemeingültiges auszusagen. Seine Phantasie entzündet sich am scheinbar Nebensächlichen, am Einfach-Alltäglichen, um es lyrisch umzumünzen. [p. 547]

These characteristics which Reso seeks to attribute solely to Das Schwalbenbuch are in fact an accurate appreciation of the nature of Toller's lyricism in both works.

From here Reso tries to detach Toller's poetic skill from the ideas which he conveys in order to accord him the status of 'echter Lyriker'. [p. 547] He thus separates off those passages descriptive of the swallows from those which reflect on the issues raised from observation and proceeds to denigrate the latter for the 'Unklarheit seiner [Tollers] gedanklichen Konzeption'. [p. 548] He then even marks out parts of the reflective passages concerning rebellion against the prison regime as strong in order to indict for their weakness those sections which suggest a moral basis for true human community:

In den Gedichten endlich, in denen Zukunftsträchtiges, Weg-Weisendes entwickelt werden soll, ist das Neue ohne Beziehung zum Realen formuliert, so daß das Visionäre unwirklich wird, das Irreale überwiegt. [p. 549]

The criticism here harks back to Reso's introduction and his view of Toller's politics as lacking revolutionary understanding. In order to do this, Reso has to ignore Toller's conviction that the *Gemeinschaft* cannot come about through the conflict between ideologies which are based on an assumption of inherent human supremacy, an idea contained in the final strophe of the poem.

Reso is at his clearest and most sensitive when discussing the wealth of poetic styles and techniques in the poem, and he is generous in his praise. He even seems to revise his previous antipathy towards the reflective passages: 'Der Kontrast zwischen Reflexion und Erlebnis bewirkt eine Vertiefung nach beiden Seiten hin.' [p. 554] He accords the poem an important place in German lyric poetry while repeating in more gentle mode some of his criticisms of Toller's ideological basis. Carefully depicting Toller as genuine but politically confused, he defends him against the charge of conscious self-association with the cultural policies of the SPD, which Reso sees

as aiming at the diversion of the otherwise revolutionary energies of the working class.

It is not difficult to point to a number of inconsistencies in Reso's arguments, but one should extend to him the historical understanding which he had the grace to bestow on Toller at the end of his article. What Reso attempted in 1961 was the rehabilitation of an extremely awkward literary and historical figure who aroused considerable suspicion on both deeply entrenched sides of the Cold War, which had reached one of its crises in the year of the article's publication with the building of the Berlin Wall. In fact a certain ration of Marxist polemic was probably necessary in order to achieve publication in the Weimarer Beiträge at all. The tension between Reso's political line and his literary perceptions, which gives rise to frequent contradictions and inconsistencies in his argumentation, suggests that he was obliged to include the political perspective in order even to be able to publish his appreciation of Toller's verse. When he immerses himself in literary criticism, he displays great enthusiasm for Toller's poetry and respect for his abilities, courage and humanitarianism, and demonstrates sensitivity to the unique texture of the poetry. Reso's real achievement is his contribution to a partial reassessment of Toller which led to the publication of the Ausgewählte Schriften, which include not only Das Schwalbenbuch but also the collection Vormorgen, in more than one sense the culmination of Toller's poetic achievement.

In her examination of the function of the swallows in the poem, Cosentino sees them both as objects of concrete description and as 'Sinnbilder heiligen, d.h. heilen Lebens, die verschüttete humanistische Kräfte zum Zwecke gesellschaftlicher Veränderung erwecken sollen'. [p. 114] This model role determines the structure of the poem through the antithetical contrast of the animal as ideal against the shortcomings of human society. The foremost animal characteristic for her is the lack of wanton violence, symbolised by the flight of the swallows. This is described by Toller in religious terms, each aspect of their flight reflecting another (non-violent) dimension of the divine. Thus Cosentino argues that Toller's praise of the inorganic arises from its lack of consciousness and its inability to do harm. While a case can be made for this from a reading of Das Schwalbenbuch in isolation, our understanding of the sonnet 'Pfade zur Welt' from the Gedichte der Gefangenen shows that Toller views the inorganic as the most divine in that it displays more unambiguously its part in the pattern of existence and is incapable of the conceits of higher order beings which prevent them from accepting the humility of their place in the natural order.

It is at this point that her polemic with Reso, whom she elevates to the authority of 'DDR-Forschung', begins to undermine her argument. [p. 117] The

victory of the swallows acting in unison against the sparrow hawk is described as the depiction of a solidarity which Toller, through his experience of the Councils Republic, should know does not exist. However she fails to mention that the swallows represent an ideal *Gemeinschaft* based on mutual acceptance and on recognition of their place in the greater order, and thus cannot be seen as a wishful rewriting of the past but rather as a direction for the future. Cosentino's argument regains its force when she defends the use of the swallows 'nicht [als] Anlaß zur Gestaltung eines marxistischen Kampfprogramms' but as an analogy through which the poet tries to resolve his spiritual crisis. [p. 119]

Pittock's treatment of Das Schwalbenbuch is a short section in a chapter on poetry in a general work on Toller's life and oeuvre. Even given the necessary brevity of his treatment, Pittock's approach suffers from an indulgence of subjective judgement and from a certain opaqueness of expression. Among the less successful comments are those which he makes on Toller's style:

[...] the cycle is in free verse, which because it is not a disciplined form - and some of the less successful pieces not surprisingly move toward prose - offers a strong temptation to emotional indulgence, even though at the same time it enables Toller to cultivate a fuller tonal range in poetry than ever before. [p. 158]

Whilst the final assertion, that the plurality of form enables Toller to communicate across a wide emotional spectrum, is undoubtedly correct, the success of such communication is due in large measure to the discipline and restraint of the free form verse, which is often deceptively highly structured. Ironically it is those more overtly structured passages, such as 'Schwälbchen, der Morgen, der Morgen ist da!' and 'Sah schreiten ein Mädchen', which are the most emotionally indulgent and sentimental. [GW II 341 and 344 respectively]

Dove's primary concern is to trace the development of Toller's ideas of revolutionary socialism from his early dramas up to his death in 1939. Rather than analyse formally therefore, Dove examines those elements of Das Schwalbenbuch which are significant for Toller's psychological and political development. He describes the poem as 'defining the ideals of regeneration and revolution', but points to the lack of concrete means suggested to achieve these ideals. [p. 256] For Dove, the attack on the sparrow-hawk provides an analogy from the animal kingdom which is the closest Toller comes to defining the nature of the action necessary to achieve his ideals. Within the parameters of his approach and aims, Dove does not examine the idea of the animals as more than a paradigm of desired human behaviour and as in some senses defining a state of existence to which man should aspire.

None of the secondary literature thus far published on Das Schwalbenbuch sees the swallows as embodying not just a truly communal way of life which humanity would do well to adopt but also a state of being which in its lack of sophistication is *ipso facto* nearer to complete integration into the pattern of existence. This perspective is supported by examination of the poem in the context of the Gedichte der Gefangenen and of the development of Toller's spiritual and metaphysical thinking in the Briefe aus dem Gefängnis.

4.4 Form in Das Schwalbenbuch

The disingenuous simplicity of the title of Das Schwalbenbuch belies the diversity of its 662 lines of verse. These could be divided into roughly forty-two individual passages or sub-poems, each with its own formal and thematic characteristics. Almost three quarters of these sections run to less than twenty lines in length, twelve even to less than ten, whereas five sections are in excess of thirty lines. In no way does the diversity of style lag behind that of length. There are strictly strophic sections, a converted *Volkslied*, long passages of free form, short sections of intensely dense lyricism, sections of undisguised prose, apostrophes, cumulative repetitions, lists, calls to arms and narrative passages. The poem runs the entire gamut of emotions from near-suicidal misery, desperation and anger through pathos and sentimentality to joy and humour.

Yet despite this dazzling plurality the poem does not leave the reader with an impression of disunity. Those who had read the Gedichte der Gefangenen would recognise immediately many of the themes of the prison sonnets, solitude, desperation, fear, the longing for intimacy, death, the outside world, and so on. But the reader coming afresh appreciates that it is a kind of *Bildungsgedicht*: the prisoner, having lost his bearings on his world and in danger of sinking into apathy, and even suicide, experiences - albeit vicariously through the swallows - a series of events and is exposed to a number of perspectives which leave him at the end of the poem readjusted to his world and in possession of greater awareness both of himself and of his place in the scheme of things. To this extent the title of the poem is misleading because the real focus is the prisoner himself and his relation to his world.

We are invited to experience with the prisoner the extremes of his emotions not merely through the lyrical intensity with which they are depicted but also through the poetic form of given sections, which both declares and supports the emotional tenor of the passage. The harmony of topos and form contribute to the poem's overall impression of integrity. Das Schwalbenbuch is a distinctive poem, and this

accounts in large measure for its success. Many elements go to make up this distinctiveness: the situation of the writer himself, the use of the extended analogy of the swallows and in particular the variety of compositional elements, on which we shall now concentrate. As has been stated, there is a wide variety of forms and lengths of poems, and these encompass in their separate ways forms and styles from the entire range of Toller's poetry, from his earliest attempts to the terse denseness of the poems which were to be published shortly after Das Schwalbenbuch in the collection Vormorgen. Thus Das Schwalbenbuch, in addition to being thematically summative of the Gedichte der Gefangenen, is also a kind of formal encyclopaedia of Toller's poetry.

This establishes on a larger scale a characteristic we have observed of his poetic development, namely that while there are conscious and drastic changes of stylistic direction, Toller always seeks to incorporate or comment on previously adopted styles, never to deny them. In this way we can say of Das Schwalbenbuch what will be said of Vormorgen in the next chapter, that this mature phase of his poetry is not just a demonstration of the mastery he had achieved but also a record of his development hitherto. Given the overall unity of the poem, the approach which was adopted to examine the Gedichte der Gefangenen, namely that of the analysis of all of the individual poems within broad thematic groupings, would be inappropriate here to describe succinctly the integrity of such a lengthy poem. Instead we shall consider examples from the four main phases of Toller's poetic work, and examine them from the point of view both of that which reflects previous phases of his poetry and of those elements which demonstrate development.

After the swallows have built their nest, Toller speculates on where they sleep when they are exposed to the elements:

Ich glaube,
Es öffnen sich Euch
Die Kelche der Blumen,
Ich glaube,
Es wiegt Euch zur Ruhe
Der Blütenklang im Dom der Kastanien. [GW II 333]

The most obvious feature here characteristic of his early poetry is the vocabulary. Flowers, buds and trees figured prominently in his early poetry as they did in literary Impressionism and *Jugendstil*, and evocative of *Neuromantik* is the element of synaesthesia in 'Blütenklang'. Peculiar to Toller however is the association of trees with cathedrals, as in the prison sonnet 'Wälder': 'Ihr Buchenwälder, Dome der Bedrückten'. [GW II 310] Here too the trees are the cathedrals of nature, in that they are large and impressive objects and they offer sanctuary to those in need of shelter.

The association of music with the branches of trees occurs in two other poems: in the sonnet 'Abend am Bodensee' we find the description 'Die Buchenkronen winden sich zu Symphonien', and in 'Umarmung' there is 'stolzer Orgelklang in Blütenzweigen' as the lovers part. This conjunction of religiosity, natural fecundity and music, combined with Toller's fascination on many levels for trees, is clearly enduring, but the easy balance of the two halves of this free form strophe shows considerable progress from the more rigid 'finger exercises' of his earlier poetry.

There are several examples of poetry with a declamatory tone similar to Toller's early Expressionist verse, the most illustrative of which is 'Menschen wie arm Eure Feste!'. [GW II 337-338] The tenor of the poem, its accusatory tone and not least its length have clear parallels in poems such as 'Den Müttern' and 'Leichen im Priesterwald'. Undoubtedly though the impact of the poem is much more focused as a result of a number of refinements of technique. Toller begins by indicting the modernity of society:

Jazztänze schrill von verruchter Zeit!
Eure Lebensangst
Ankurbelt Autos der Selbstflucht,
Illuminiert
Die Seele
Mit Lampions elektrischer Gier [GW II 337]

These compressed images describe in a rich and multi-layered way how technology can only be a temporary flight from the recognition of common humanity and of man's more humble place in the universe. Sooner or later the electric light will actually be the instrument not to divert attention but to expose man's soul in all of its presumptuousness and moral poverty. In a series of ever more suggestive ideas and neologisms Toller builds up the intensity of humanity's frenetic activity: 'All Euer Lärm, Euer Gekreisch, Euer Gekrächz, Euer Freudeplakatieren, Lustigsindwir - / Hahaha'. It is a successful line and the compounds are much more consistent than those in for example 'Der Meister', showing Toller this time in control of his critical anger. Furthermore the crescendo into hysterical laughter of the first part of this strophe contrasts effectively with the trinity of ultimately inescapable fears, 'Leere Furcht Verlassenheit', carefully spaced out in the original edition of Das Schwalbenbuch in order to emphasise the inner void.

Unlike in the earlier poems Toller does not allow this passage to end either in desperation or in just a brief indication of a positive direction. He proceeds to apostrophise the youth which grew up in the shadow of revolutionary defeat, initially adopting a verbless style:

Deine Tat: Zeugung.
Deine Stille: Empfängnis.
Dein Fest: Geburt. [GW II 338]

The fertility of the youth of tomorrow is placed in contrast with the implied sterility of modern society. There then follow four couplets, the first line of each being a single present participle, and the second following the pattern of 'in' plus adjective and substantive in the genitive case, beginning 'Opfernd / Im todnahen Kampf heroischer Fahne' and concluding 'Ahnend / Im magischen Schweigen gestirnter Nacht'. [Ibid.] The strophe contains densely packed imagery and a tight structure emphasised by the avoidance of uncontracted articles. Toller concludes the passage with 'Schon schaue ich Dich, / Gewandelte Jugend der Revolution', repeated lines which parenthesise the second section of the passage. A clear characteristic here of the maturity of the poetry is Toller's refusal to draw an explicit moral, choosing instead to achieve his effect through suggestion.

The disciplined structure of the sonnets in the Gedichte der Gefangenen, which enabled Toller initially to express his prison experiences in a controlled and universally comprehensible manner, finds a place in his song to the young swallows, 'Schwälbchen, der Morgen, der Morgen ist da!'. [GW II 341] The versification and metre of the passage is entirely consistent, which is emphasised by the repetition in the first and fourth lines in each stanza. Being addressed to the swallows' young, the poem affects a low lexical register, a studied simplicity which was used to good effect in the *Verharmlosung* of the prison environment in the sonnet 'Begegnung in der Zelle'. Built into the passage is a progression from the reminder of the young swallows' dependancy, through the opening of their eyes to the outside world, to their engagement with that world when they leave and migrate. In a sense this also mirrors the prisoner's own progression through the poem, from his initial introversion, through the experience of the swallows resensitising his awareness of the outside world, to his own eventual release. The passage is effective, if a little sentimental, but it is interesting that this is one of only a very few examples of overt structure in the poem. As Das Schwalbenbuch marks a conscious move from the sonnet form to mature Expressionism, it is hardly surprising that sonnets should not feature and that the poem should be almost entirely written in Expressionist free form.

The passages we have considered thus far demonstrate how Das Schwalbenbuch relates to Toller's own poetic antecedents. Other passages point forward in the compactness and suggestivity of their form to Vormorgen and in particular to the terse war poems of the Verse vom Friedhof. When Toller, delighted by the arrival of the swallows, attempts to retain them by shutting them into his cell,

he understands that he is inflicting the same cruelty on them which he himself is forced to endure:

Sechs Schritt hin
Sechs Schritt her

Ohne Sinn

Ohne Sinn [GW II 331]

Although we have here only ten words, both in form and content they communicate a wealth of meaning. The pacing cadence of the first two lines, their alliteration and overall similarity describe the limits of the prisoner's world and in a sense measure it. The repetition continues into the following two lines: their content is meaningless, but then naturally also is their repetition. Form and content describe here a unity, as is the case in many of the Verse vom Friedhof.

Another example which evinces a power and suggestivity similar to that of the Vormorgen poems such as 'Stellungskrieg' occurs near the end of the poem. The swallow parents grieve in 'Erhabenes Schweigen' over the death of four of their young, and Toller anticipates the loneliness he will suffer when they depart:

Nicht trage
In Nächten der Verfinsterung
Sehnsucht
Nach Menschen.
Fürchte das Wort, das erwürgt.

Wahrlich,
Erst wen Du nennst,
Stirbt Deiner Seele ganz. [GW II 348]

All nights are dark, but there is a distinction here between physical darkness and those 'dark nights of the soul' resulting from the loneliness described in sonnets from the Gedichte der Gefangenen such as 'Nächte'. The nature of the word which can wield such destructive emotive force is not specified. It could be *Verlassenheit*, which occurs not only at the beginning of the poem but also centrally in the trinity 'Leere Furcht Verlassenheit'; significantly, it also occurs in the description of August Hagemeister's death in Eine Jugend in Deutschland, the Briefe aus dem Gefängnis and Justiz-Erlebnisse. The word could even be Hagemeister's name, in which case he would be present but unnamed both at the beginning and at the end of the poem. Or the name could be that of a loved one for whom one longs but whom one cannot touch. The ambiguity is one of the strengths of the poem, allowing the reader to find a meaning with personal relevance. The final strophe of the passage is highly compact, and once more both form and content are mutually enriching, pointing to

the power and density of the feelings evoked. This is one of the factors which contribute to the strength of the Verse vom Friedhof, to be discussed in the next chapter.

In another work this diversity of form and style might be accorded a weakness, as might the lack of a tighter structure. However the unifying background is the experience of the prisoner which, as a reading of the Gedichte der Gefangenen or of the Briefe aus dem Gefängnis shows, consists of a never-ending roller coaster of mood swings in response to events and stimuli almost invariably beyond his control. For each of these emotional extremes, Toller chooses the most apt form in Das Schwalbenbuch: the more formal structure of the *Volkslied* and the nature-related lyricism of the earliest poetry convey euphoria, the longer form of early Expressionism conveys anger and accusation and the terse late Expressionist passages deal with moments of frustration and despair. The articulation of experience through the most apt formal medium provides the poem with consistency and enables the reader to finish the poem with an impression of unity. This is enhanced by the continuity of theme from the Gedichte der Gefangenen and the development of the prisoner's perceptions through his observation of the swallows. The success of this variety of forms made a simple reprint of the Gedichte der Gefangenen impossible, hence their revision as the Lieder der Gefangenen before their inclusion in Vormorgen. The prison sonnets show the prisoner struggling with problems, and Das Schwalbenbuch shows him finding a perspective through which to overcome them. The publication of the Lieder der Gefangenen after Das Schwalbenbuch leaves them as a form of biographical document, as we shall note in particular of the Verse vom Friedhof.

Das Schwalbenbuch marks the beginning of a new poetic phase. Having demonstrated his control and poetic maturity in the Gedichte der Gefangenen, and having successfully combined elements of his earliest poetry, Toller now wished to return to Expressionist free form and to reassert his control over his early Expressionist phase. This was particularly important once he could see the contrast in style between Die Wandlung and Masse Mensch: he could not deny that the same kind of *Vergangenheitsbewältigung* was necessary in his poetry, and in the Gedichte der Gefangenen had demonstrated his willingness to do so. The free form introductory poem to the second edition of the Gedichte der Gefangenen in 1923 complements the writing of Das Schwalbenbuch in the same year and posts an intention eventually to adapt the Gedichte der Gefangenen to the new poetic style of the Lieder der Gefangenen.

But what of the close relationship between the form he adopted, the content or theme, and the role which the poetry played in his life? As has been shown, the Gedichte der Gefangenen were the perfect vehicle for communicating the extremes of his habituation to prison life. The sonnet form lends itself to short and limited observations from which generalisations can nonetheless often be drawn. The discipline of such a clearly defined form provided him with parameters within which he could communicate his experiences in a manner which was safe for him (in that it helped him control his emotions and remain balanced) and which was comprehensible to the reader, avoiding the trap of over-personalising or becoming too enigmatic, the signs of which are clearly evident in his early Expressionist poetry.

The arrival of the swallows presented Toller both with an opportunity and with a problem. The opportunity was to unite many of the ideas of the Gedichte der Gefangenen into Das Schwalbenbuch through the manifold image of the swallows, and to present the whole range of ideas from the perspective of the natural order. The problem was that the sonnet form was, in Toller's hands, too limited and individuated to carry a range of themes throughout a total of well over six hundred lines of verse. In fact any strictly strophic style was likely to inhibit the expression of the wealth of ideas which was being suggested to him.

Hence the return to free form. As in the days of his early political involvement, it was to be used to address ambitious themes, but now with a clearer prospect of success as a result of the confidence gained from his mastery of the sonnet. This combination of poetic confidence with the stylistic insights he had gained from the writing of Masse Mensch was supported by the central image of the swallows: the need to describe them in specific, concrete detail and to relate all of the reflections in the poem to them prevented him from producing an abstract and enigmatic work which would fail to engage a wide readership.

The writing of the drama Masse Mensch had in effect shown Toller the way forward in his verse writing. It is significant that from here to the end of his period in prison his verse writing continues along an ever more successful line of development in Expressionist free form, the culmination of which are the terse but immensely suggestive Verse vom Friedhof. With the poetic drives being expressed in verse, his drama gradually becomes more conventional in its diction. While one would rightly hesitate to describe Hinkemann or Der entfesselte Wotan as realist, let alone naturalist, it can be said that in varying degrees in these last two plays of his imprisonment the dramatic language is more natural, closer to everyday speech. Even though Der entfesselte Wotan is a rather fantastic comedy, the dialogue is much closer to the conventional and far away from the Expressionist reductionism of Masse

Mensch. Of all of the plays completed in prison, only of Die Wandlung can it be stated that his dramatic language and the diction of the verse he was writing at the time converge. While writing the terse, free form Masse Mensch, Toller was engaged on the formally orientated sonnets, and Hinkemann and Der entfesselte Wotan were completed while he was writing the sparing, Expressionist Das Schwalbenbuch and Vormorgen. To this extent, Das Schwalbenbuch conforms exactly to the thesis on experience and the form in which it was poetically articulated, as it has developed thus far.

To what extent though did the writing of Das Schwalbenbuch (and the form it took) affect the nature of Toller's experience? If the opening sequence is true to life, then the swallows reclaimed Toller from reveries of death, perhaps even contemplation of suicide. This is characteristic of mid-sentence depression, when the prisoner has begun to forget the reasons why he is incarcerated and cannot yet see an end to the unending monotony ('O dumpfer Sang unendlicher Monotonie'). [GW II 325] This form provided him with a more expansive canvas on which to paint, allowing him to restate some of the deeply-held ideals for which he had been imprisoned, thus re-imbuing the experience with meaning and purpose. The idea of the annual return of the swallows - however unsuccessful it transpired to be in practice - helped him to envisage an end to his sentence ('Ein Sommer noch'). [GW II 344] It gave him an opportunity to provide a more constructive direction to the issues raised by the Gedichte der Gefangenen which, while containing many positives, nonetheless portray overall the loneliness and desolation of prison experience. And finally the act of writing itself was therapeutic, breaking his frequent spells of apathy and disinterestedness. In all, the openness of the form allowed Toller to embrace the world beyond the prison yard. The swallows and their young were the proxies through which he was able once more to experience the variety and intensity of the outside world, and for this experience an expansive conception of poetic form was necessary.

With Das Schwalbenbuch Toller had emphatically broken with the sonnet form and indeed with the constraints of established poetic forms. Just as the sonnets themselves had represented a swing of the pendulum away from the deceptive formal freedom which had proved so difficult for him to master in his early Expressionist phase, Das Schwalbenbuch is an uninhibited embracing of free form, ultimately the poetic mode in which he felt most at home. Once more however formal extremes, the control of the sonnet and the expressiveness of free form, were to find a synthesis in which the best aspects of previous styles were to be preserved and incorporated, and it is this which we shall find in Vormorgen.

Chapter 5

Vormorgen and the mature Expressionist poetry (1924-1938)

The final year of Toller's prison sentence (1924) saw the publication not only of Das Schwalbenbuch but also of the collection Vormorgen. Gustav Kiepenheuer of Potsdam was fully justified in his decision to publish two major editions of Toller's poetry in the same year: both books, but particularly Das Schwalbenbuch, swiftly sold out of the first print run. With Toller's release from his five-year sentence impending, the timing of the publication was commercially propitious, however there is no suggestion that the publication was held back in any way and this is supported by the poetic maturity which Vormorgen displays. The collection contains the Verse vom Friedhof, which chart Toller's life up to the Councils Republic, two short poems in remembrance of the revolutionary dead (Zwei Tafeln), the Chorwerk Requiem den gemordeten Brüdern and the Lieder der Gefangenen, the edited versions of the Gedichte der Gefangenen. In the following sections we will consider only the poems: the Chorwerk is intended primarily as a performance piece and will be considered in the next chapter along with those works which evince poetic characteristics but which are not in themselves strictly poetry.

The collection is assembled to demonstrate a line of development leading up to Toller's imminent release from prison, with the programmatic clarion-call 'Unser Weg' providing a final impression of resolution, passion and determination despite the experiences he has undergone and the failure of the revolutions. The progression is clear: youthful *Ziellosigkeit* and *Sehnsucht*, war, recuperation, revolution, reflection on the revolution, adjustment to imprisonment, the use of imprisonment to regather his energies. In this respect one could say that there is a valedictory aspect to Vormorgen, in that it heralds the onset of a new phase of Toller's life. It is a carefully edited poetic résumé of his life, with poems chosen (and re-formed) to emphasise not just a development but a consistent one. Das Schwalbenbuch too was a compilation of poetic ideas and set pieces. With his collected works and an extended narrative poem published, where was he to progress from here? There is not even the slightest hint of a poetic project of any kind in any of the surviving documentation. On release from prison, his artistic energies were channeled into his drama, and his poetry found only some limited release in a *Sprechchor*, some songs and a very few one-off poems he infrequently wrote.

Accompanying the depiction of a clear and consistent personal development in the collection is a stylistic evenness amongst the poems which is intended to support the biographical argument of the collection, namely that Toller's political instincts

remained constant during his search to find their best expression. The main elements of this style are simplicity, suggestiveness and brevity, coupled with a far more discerning (and sparing) use of language. The difference between Toller's early - and in particular his early Expressionist - poetry and the verse in Vormorgen is stark. One could even transpose this contrast into dramatic terms by comparing the enigmatic and verbose Die Wandlung with the terse and focused Masse Mensch. In a letter of 1920 to 'Frau T. D.' shortly after the composition of Masse Mensch he wrote:

Das in der 'Wandlung' brüchig gestaltete Formproblem scheint mir in 'Masse Mensch' zum erstenmal annähernd gelöst zu sein. Es ist mein Stil, mein notwendiger Ausdruck. Es wird Sie interessieren, daß ich das Drama, nachdem ich bis auf ein paar Verse fast 1 3/4 Jahr nichts geschaffen hatte, in drei Tagen, ohne äußere Vorarbeiten, in einem Zug schrieb.

Was Sie befremdet, Weglassen, Vereinfachen, hängt mit dem erwachten Wortgefühl zusammen, das in vielen Schriftstellern unserer Zeit lebendig ist. [GW V 36]

It is clear from this that he sees the style of Masse Mensch as more effective than that of Die Wandlung, recognising through this the excesses of early Expressionism. The way forward from the problems of form it presented consists of three elements: omission, here in the sense of resisting the temptation to include too much and thereby to diffuse effect; simplification of language, in other words the paring of unnecessary adjectives and adverbs, along with a reluctance to use over-rich and often inappropriate mythic imagery; and finally an enhanced *Sprachgefühl* which works through a suggestive *Dinghaftigkeit* rather than through the explicit underlining of the moral of any given poem.

While Das Schwalbenbuch heralded a return to free form poetry, Vormorgen represents a significant further step in Toller's development as a poet, providing many points of comparison between the two works. Where Das Schwalbenbuch was stylistically heterogeneous, Vormorgen displays a high level of evenness. The length of sections of Das Schwalbenbuch varied wildly, but the poems in Vormorgen are generally much more uniform in extent. The explicit moralising of Das Schwalbenbuch is replaced in Vormorgen by a suggestivity which, when effective, is stunning but which at times can be somewhat oblique. These examples demonstrate that while it was published in the same year as Das Schwalbenbuch, Vormorgen is clearly a fresh stage in Toller's poetry which combines linguistic originality with self-discipline. Considering the delay between the composition of Das Schwalbenbuch and its publication, documented in the previous chapter, it is reasonable to expect Toller's poetic abilities to have developed in the interim.

The stylistic evenness which the late Expressionist revisions bring to the collection are, as has been said, intended to corroborate a consistent linear progression in his development. While it can be argued that this is a fairly accurate reflection of his personal and political development, it ignores not just his artistic development but also the way in which this informed his actions, the interplay between perception, articulation and reaction or reassessment. Toller's unwillingness to allow his readers insights also into his creative development, or at least only to a limited extent, has a sound aesthetic and literary basis, but denies the reader an understanding of the manner in which his adopted poetic form in his earlier poetry both reflected and affected his perceptions and actions.

The chapter will conclude with an examination of three poems of which two, it will be argued, can be placed around the time of writing of Vormorgen or some time after by reference to their stylistic characteristics. The third poem is 'Die Feuer-Kantate' (1938), Toller's final published poem.

5.1 The Verse vom Friedhof and Zwei Tafeln

The pattern of experience which Toller seeks to convey in the first section of Vormorgen, the Verse vom Friedhof, is very clear and demonstrates a high degree of self-awareness. 'Der Ringende' introduces us to the rootlessness and incoherent yearning of the young man. 'Marschlied', although it is not a conventional marching song except in its form, relates enlistment and the journey into war. 'Morgen', initially at least a lighter poem, introduces the carnage of war, which is depicted as a predatory animal in 'Geschützswache'. 'Gang zum Schützengraben' and 'Gang zur Rubestellung' portray the automaton-like state of mind and the vital psychological escapism of the troops resulting from their battle experience. Although the shortest, 'Stellungskrieg' provides the fulcrum of the collection, depicting the point in the war when Toller found himself entertaining the idea of death as a welcome release from the pressures of war.

'Konzert', written during the period of recuperation, shows how the soldier cannot forget what he has lived through, and this leads directly via the suspension marks at the end of the poem to 'Leichen im Priesterwald', as the horror of his memories breaks through. The poems then begin to evince political understanding of the war. 'Alp' and 'Menschen' point to the underlying communality of all nationalities involved and therefore to the essential absurdity of the war. 'An die Dichter' and 'Den Müttern' indict in turn the ineffectiveness of so-called revolutionary intellectuals and the failure of people to accept the cruelty and arbitrariness of war

towards all people, introducing explicitly the concept of *Menschlichkeit*. 'Ich habe Euch umarmt' depicts the quasi-Messianic enthusiasm which propelled him into revolutionary politics in Munich in 1918-19, contrasting with his imprisonment and isolation in 'Über meiner Zelle'. 'Deutschland' shows him looking dejectedly at the prospect of imprisonment and of the length of time which the political struggle will take. Zwei Tafeln serve both to honour the revolutionary dead and to exhort those outside to channel their grief and disappointment into renewed revolutionary fervour. Equally they provide a structural caesura between past and present experience, balancing the Verse vom Friedhof against the Lieder der Gefangenen.

Many of the poems in the Verse vom Friedhof are attributed with dates by Toller. These dates may be taken as referring to the original events which inspired the poems or to a first draft which, like so much of Toller's work, has not survived. What is certain however is that most of these poems could not have been written in this style at the date attributed to them. This can be substantiated both by reference to the generally less skilful and longer poetry he wrote during the war and by the existence either of manuscript or of earlier published versions of the poems which show an entirely different style. The title Verse vom Friedhof itself supports the contention that these poems were written after the war. The title alludes to the Verse vom Schlacht-Feld which were published at the beginning of each wartime edition of Die Aktion. Toller's poetry, written at a distance from the war, is thus *vom Friedhof* rather than *vom Schlachtfeld*.

The poems will be examined in the order in which they appear in the Verse vom Friedhof. This is the chronological ordering which Toller attributes to them but, as will be seen, it also produces some pairings which make convenient points of comparison. The Verse vom Friedhof and Zwei Tafeln will be considered in two sections, each comprising approximately half of this part of Vormorgen. The first section will consist of those poems dealing with the immediate experience of war: apart from 'Der Ringende' and 'Marschlied', which had already seen publication, the poems from this section are likely to have been written in or shortly before 1924, although they deal with experiences from the previous decade. The second section will look at poems written at some remove from the war, which show Toller beginning to come to terms with the political implications of his experience, and which helped to form his ideological response to what he had undergone.

5.1.1 Verses from the killing fields

The opening poems of the Verse vom Friedhof section, 'Der Ringende' [AS 47, PBDG 277] and 'Marschlied' [AS 48, PBDG 277], have been examined in detail in Chapter 2. The former describes the undefined yearnings of the young man alienated from his family, and the latter evokes the doom-laden mood of the troops marching off to battle. As has been pointed out previously, 'Marschlied' must have been written well after Toller's entry into the war, as its tone is completely contrary to the more jingoistic poems he wrote initially in celebration of war. Both of these poems saw publication before the appearance of Vormorgen, unlike most of the following war poems.

'Morgen' [AS 49] and 'Geschützswache' [AS 50, PBDG 278], the next two poems, clearly do not appear in this order in Vormorgen by coincidence: there are too many similarities both in technique and content, and we shall examine these presently. The first two-thirds of 'Morgen' create a sleepy early-morning pastoral scene, in which the war does not feature to any significant extent at all. The bridge to the inescapable reality of war is provided by association:

Nebelfetzen
Trauerfahnen
Über Schützengräben.
Menschenleiber
Verstümmelte Menschenleiber...

In other poems such as 'Sämann-Soldat' we have seen Toller use contemplation of the natural environment to provide a change of mood or perspective. In 'Konzert', which we shall examine in greater detail in the next section, the subject is taken back to his war experiences in the beautiful and dignified surroundings of the concert hall by the loud music:

Decke wölbt sich zum bestirnten Firmament,
Vom Sturz der Töne überflutet
Versinkt Parkett, Getäfel flackernd brennt,
Menschen kleben nackt auf Strohgeflechten,

While the subject in 'Konzert' is then overwhelmed by his horrific memories of war, in 'Morgen' there is no poetic subject as such and nature is shown in the final line to reassert itself. The sleepy gentleness and natural beauty of nature are thus contrasted with the carnage wrought by man.

One of the functions of the rising sun in the poem is that of contrasting man's efforts with those of nature. The inevitable appearance of the sun in the morning demonstrates the continuity and resilience of nature and provides a perspective on the

transient viciousness of men at war. It can also be seen as a symbol of hope for the eventual enlightenment of man, the purity and calmness of nature providing a measure by which man can be judged. Finally, there is also hope that despite the war nature will carry on regardless, for while the poem may sink briefly into a consideration of the human carnage, nature is meanwhile going inexorably about its daily, more constructive business.

There are aspects of this poem which connect it with Toller's early poetry, and which support the date 1915 accorded to it in Vormorgen. Firstly, in 'Strahlenhauch' and 'Lichtgetaucht / Atmet der Himmel', we find elements of synaesthesia which was a characteristic of *Neuromantik* and which we found in 'Umarmung'. Similarly, the predominance of the idea of light - 'Strahlenhauch', 'Lichtgetaucht', 'Sonne' - and the reference to 'der Buchen Gezweig' are reminiscent of literary *Jugendstil*. However, the expressive free form of the poem shows how far Toller has developed since the early poetry, as do constructions such as 'nachtverschlungen' and 'schlafhockend'. This suggests the possibility that many of these poems in their Vormorgen form are re-workings of earlier drafts. It is significant to note that in this process Toller combines rather than rejects earlier poetic techniques.

Although it is a shorter poem, 'Geschützswache' is considerably more complex. The first part of the poem creates a pregnant atmosphere of threat, which is broken rapidly by the action of the firing of the round; nature then immediately reasserts itself in the closing line, linking the poem structurally with 'Morgen'. As is the case with 'Nacht im Priesterwald', the poem is punctuated by reminders of the natural surroundings, which serve several functions. Firstly, they unsettle the reader and ensure concentration. Secondly, they form a reminder that nature exists independently of man's ability to create his own artificial horrors, a similar point to that in 'Morgen'. And finally, the moon, the starry sky and the pastoral surroundings are symbols of natural harmony and continuity, which serve to point up further the transient nature of man-made evils.

The innocent and harmless face of nature is exemplified here by the owl and by the child, an unwritten (and therefore as yet unspoiled) human page. The comparison is between these and the wolf, representing the shell, and the monster, that is the cannon itself. In its usual state a wolf is predatory, but naturally so; a 'tückischer Wolf' can only be a man-made thing, because in its natural state, a wolf's predatory actions are not malicious, but rather the result of natural instincts. Man however can exercise the choice to act in what he knows is an evil way, and thus a moral value is overlaid on to the image of the wolf.

The opening line of the poem leads the reader to expect a gentle nature poem, but the atmosphere of imminent threat is introduced in the second line. This device has been used in early poems such as 'Der Ringende' to distance the poet from his own literary and apolitical beginnings. Here there is no deflation of convention, although Toller is describing a very different world from that which had previously provided the conventions of nature-related poetry. More interestingly, he uses this device to disorientate and manipulate the reader: the less introverted and more poetic use of the device demonstrates that both this poem and 'Morgen' form a bridge between the early and the mature poetry. There are technical developments here which also show how Toller has progressed from his early poetry. The control of the terse form of the poem is a very sure one; and he seems quite at home in omitting prepositions and conjunctions, for example in 'Gebändigtes Untier / Glänzt mein Geschütz' and 'Lindenblüten duftet die Nacht'.

From what has been discussed above, it can be seen that 'Morgen' and 'Geschütz' form no accidental pairing. Just as 'Gang zum Schützengraben' and 'Gang zur Ruhestellung' will deal with the back-and-forth of a soldier's life, these two deal with his night and day. Both parenthesise evocation of the horror of war with poetic references to the beauty of nature. What distinguishes them is the way in which nature is used to point up the man-made catastrophe of war. If one considers the use made of nature by the other German war poets, one can see that Toller's use is in fact distinctive. Nature forms the background to many of the poems of August Stramm; but in Stramm's work, the disintegration of nature is seen as a concomitant of war, for example in the poem 'Abend':

Zähnen
 Plantschet streif das Blut des Himmels
 Denken schicksalt
 Tode zattern und verklatschen
 Sterne dünnen
 Scheine schwimmen
 Wolken greifen fetz das Haar¹

Unlike Toller, Stramm does not draw any line between the process of nature and that of war and does not use the former to comment implicitly on the latter. Nature also forms the backdrop to Kurt Heynicke's 'Sonne hinter dem Schlachtfeld':

Helle Blüte flattert auf,
 flattert über unsern grauen Panzer,
 rosa Sonne,

¹ August Stramm, 'Abend', in August Stramm: Das Werk, ed. by René Radrizzani, Wiesbaden, 1963, p. 85.

blonde Sonne,
spielhin
spielher²

Heynicke's use of nature in this context is somewhat cynical, and is aimed at undermining accepted poetic conventions, a process called by Korte in his study of Expressionist war poetry a 'Tendenz zur Deformation kosmischer Motive'.³ Neither Stramm nor Heynicke use nature to comment on the actions of man; and because he needs nature as a yardstick, Toller does not put it through any form of poetic distortion.

Next in the Vormorgen collection comes the tandem pair 'Gang zum Schützengraben' [AS 51, PBDG 278] and 'Gang zur Ruhestellung' [AS 52]. The former is a more overtly structured poem, full of metrical echoes and symmetries which serve both to reflect the dogged marching action of the soldiers themselves and the monotony and repetitiousness of their experiences. The two halves of the first strophe share the same structure: both start with a preposition and a noun, followed in the second line by a qualifying phrase, and then culminating in a verb beginning 'st-'. Through this structure, the shell holes of the first half are equated with the prone soldiers of the second. The soldiers are no longer individuals, they merely form part of a landscape. The second strophe starts with a description of the dreariness of the scene, and then becomes progressively more monotonous, insistent and *telegrammhaft*. 'Leuchtraketen' and 'Pestlaternen' scan identically and set the rhythm for the deadening last line 'Zum Graben zum Graben', which is reminiscent of the bleating of sheep - perhaps lambs to the slaughter - and similar to the final line of 'Alp': 'Es blökt den Takt das Schaf bäh bäh'. The effectiveness of the last line may also stem from the similarity of 'Graben' to 'Grab', as the culmination of the dismal images and of the gloomy and fatalistic atmosphere.⁴ This idea is prefigured by the mention of 'Totenfingern'. While this poem is skilfully constructed and evocative, it is nonetheless limited in the range of ideas which it communicates and has the atmosphere of a mood poem.

Quite different in this respect is its partner, 'Gang zur Ruhestellung'. It too portrays unrelieved misery and evokes a dismal atmosphere, but it also points to ideas

² Kurt Heynicke, 'Sonne hinter dem Schlachtfeld', in Heynicke, Das lyrische Werk, Bd. I, Worms, 1974, p. 152.

³ Korte, op. cit., p. 165.

⁴ Cf. the play on this assonance in the passage from Remarque's Der Weg zurück quoted below.

beyond its specific frame of reference. There is no obvious scheme to its construction, and the impressions referred to are as random and arbitrary as war itself. The negatively collective nature of war is brought out through the indeterminacy and anonymity of the figures in the poem: 'Mann hinter Mann [...] Irgendwer [...] Einer [...] Massengrab'. A mass grave no longer shocks or otherwise grabs the attention: the intimate acquaintance with death in the trenches produces a moral vacuum. At the sight of this slaughter the observer in the poem (presumably the poet himself) can even drift off into a daydream, but this is a kind of self-defence mechanism: unable to comprehend fully the horror of a mass grave, he flees back into his uncomplicated, secure childhood days. This flight from unacceptable reality has already been noted as a feature of some of the Gedichte der Gefangenen, such as 'Spaziergang der Sträflinge'. The juxtaposition of 'Massengrab' and 'Weihnachtskuchen' also introduces an element of the grotesque. Even the death of fourteen people due to one single mine has no power to shock: in the midst of wholesale carnage, it is merely one of a succession of similar incidents and is thus unremarkable.⁵ Time, too, is relativised, and even the events of yesterday are not clearly discernible, blending into the grey monotony of life in the trenches. The portrayal of war-weariness in this poem is similar to that in the works of other contemporary writers, for example Erich Maria Remarque in Der Weg zurück:

Viele liegen da von uns [...] Wir sind ja zusammengeblieben, sie in den Gräbern, wir in den Gräben, nur durch ein paar Handvoll Erde getrennt [...] manchmal brachten die Granaten auch sie wieder herauf zu uns, hochgeschleuderte zerfallende Knochen, Uniformreste, verweste, nasse, schon erdige Köpfe, die im Trommelfeuer noch einmal aus ihren verschütteten Unterständen in die Schlacht zurückkehrten. Wir empfanden es nicht als schrecklich; wir waren ihnen zu nahe.⁶

This passage evokes many of the themes of this poem, as well as one of the techniques of 'Gang zum Schützengraben', in that the semantic similarity of 'Grab'

⁵ The poem is reminiscent of the following passage from Eine Jugend in Deutschland, which also describes war-weariness:

Dreizehn Monate bleibe ich an der Front, die großen Empfindungen werden stumpf, die großen Worte klein, Krieg wird zum Alltag, Frontdienst zum Tagwerk, Helden werden Opfer [...] Die Führungsringe von Blindgängergranaten hauen wir ab, aus Leichtsinne. Neulich ist eine krepirt und hat zwei Mann zerrissen, ist nicht alles gleichgültig? [GW IV 72-73]

⁶ Erich Maria Remarque, Der Weg zurück, Hamburg, 1982, p. 15; originally published in Berlin, 1929.

and 'Graben' is played upon.⁷ The sheer physical horror of the decaying corpses brings us close to many of Toller's other poems, especially 'Leichen im Priesterwald' and 'Mütter'. The indeterminacy of the people and events in 'Gang zur Ruhestellung' helps to communicate the grey uniformity of war, and the bare style builds up to a powerful, terse, single-word ending.

The style in both Remarque and Toller can be described as sober, detached and dispassionate, leaving very little to the imagination, yet not over-dramatising the situation. While being evocative of the state of war-weariness itself, it must also be a product of the fact that both related their war experiences at some remove from the actual events. While Toller's early Expressionist war poetry is more authentic, in the sense that it is more of a contemporary account of events, it is less successful than the new war poems of the Verse vom Friedhof in communicating its ideas to the general reader. Toller and Remarque are certainly not the only writers who needed distance from these events in order successfully to formulate their war experiences: Ernst Glaeser's Jahrgang 1902 and Ludwig Renn's Krieg did not appear until 1928 and 1929 respectively.⁸ The experience of the trenches appears to have been so traumatic that many writers required an 'incubation period' before they felt they could depict the war.⁹

The two Toller poems examined above form a thematic pairing, but apart from that and the atmosphere of misery, there is little other similarity. 'Gang zum Schützengraben' is a carefully constructed poem which seeks to communicate to the reader directly the deadening effect of war in the trenches. 'Gang zur Ruhestellung', on the other hand, while employing a similarly negative range of vocabulary ('Torkelt

⁷ In his poem 'Der Graben' (1927) Tucholsky also plays on this assonance when talking about soldiers at the front:

Ihr wart gut genug zum Fraß für Raben,
für das Grab, Kamraden, für den Graben!

Tucholsky (writing as Theobald Tiger), 'Der Graben', Gesammelte Werke, ed. by Mary Gerold-Tucholsky and Fritz J. Raddatz, Bd. 2 (1925-1928), pp. 573-574, here p. 574.

⁸ Ernst Glaeser, Jahrgang 1902, Berlin, 1928; Ludwig Renn, Krieg, Frankfurt am Main, 1929.

⁹ Alone of the five previously unpublished war poems in the Verse vom Friedhof, 'Gang zur Ruhestellung' exists in a slightly longer (and less successful) manuscript version in the N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv in Koblenz. [APP]

[...] müde [...] grauen [...] stumpfen'), points to such general ideas as moral relativity through fairly simple devices, and this indicates a surer poetic touch.

The poems we have considered in this section deal for the most part with men's reactions to the physical reality of war. 'Stellungskrieg' [AS 53] examines a similar theme to that of 'Marschlied', namely the automaton-like attitude which, on the one hand, is necessary for soldiers to be able to bear the strain of war, but which on the other degrades them to the status of any other component of the *Materialschlacht*. Despite the similarity of topos, compositionally the two poems could hardly be more disparate. In the one, Toller works within and undermines the convention of the marching song; 'Stellungskrieg', however, is only eighteen words long, and both in format and in the stripping-down of language to its most essential parts, there are striking similarities with the poetry of August Stramm. Despite being so short, it achieves an effect as great as most of the longer war poems, and this is largely due to the claustrophobic atmosphere which it so economically creates - 'Alltag hämmert, / Würgt Dich' - and to the way in which the topos is communicated so briefly.

An important aspect of the poem is the ambiguity concerning 'letzten Kampf'. On the face of it, of course, this applies to the last battle, that is to say, to the end of the war, but this clearly also refers to death, for when the conditions of war become intolerable, then death gains a positive value as a release from this excruciating state of tension. It is the ultimate debasement of values when death is accorded a greater value than life, and this is particularly *unmenschlich*, for it contradicts Toller's belief in the redemption of man in the temporal sphere and undermines any belief in values which make life worthwhile. However, Toller's attitude to death is not always so unequivocal as this bitter poem would suggest: within Vormorgen itself in the Lieder der Gefangenen we find signs of a reassessment of the relationship between life and death, for example in 'Gefangener und Tod'. It should be noted here that Toller's view of death in this poem is not positive: he is saying in effect that war is such an awful experience that even death can seem a release.

The core of the Verse vom Friedhof is undoubtedly formed by the five late Expressionist war poems which had not previously been published, from 'Morgen' to 'Stellungskrieg'. By 1924 Toller's poetic competence and control were equal to the articulation of the numbing horrors of everyday life in the trenches. As with the communication of the nature of prison life, articulation was obliged to wait until a poetic form had been achieved which not only expressed Toller's reactions but crucially aroused also the empathy of the reader. The quality of these poems is in large part a product of their sobriety and matter-of-factness: Toller had appreciated

the power of the understated and of the unsaid, resisting all temptations to moralise on the reader's behalf.

5.1.2 Poems of political awakening

The five unpublished war poems were written at the peak of Toller's poetic powers at some considerable remove from the experiences which inspired them. Of all the Vormorgen poems they communicate the most directly with the reader. With the exception of 'Konzert', all of the Verse vom Friedhof considered in this section had been published by the time Vormorgen appeared. We are able to corroborate the dating of these poems in Vormorgen biographically, and this accords with the stylistic characteristics of the poems. The main point in which they differ from the war poems in the previous section is in their function: the previous poems sought merely to communicate the horrors of war whereas these, written for the most part contemporaneously with the events they examine, form part of Toller's reactions to the experiences they describe. In this sense their articulation provides him with the means to deal with the issues that they raise. In effect the poems in this section are formative whereas those examined previously are summative.

'Konzert' [AS 54, PBDG 278] is a poem which is concerned, amongst other things, with the mark which war leaves on its participants; 'Nacht im Priesterwald' [APP], one of the poems examined in Chapter 2, is a manuscript poem which demonstrates that, even a year after his demobilisation, Toller's experience of war was still uppermost in his mind. The former is dated in Vormorgen 'Urlaub 1916', and shows the reality of the latter breaking through at quite some remove from the war. Beyond this, the poems share certain similarities: both employ Toller's technique of opening the poem by creating certain expectations in the reader which are contradicted by what follows; and both find direct echoes in passages from Eine Jugend in Deutschland.

'Konzert' opens with a dignified description of a concert hall: 'Marmorpfeiler gischten zu kristallinen Säulen, / Decke wölbt sich zum bestirnten Firmament'. This opening is very similar to the stylised beginning of 'Aufrüttelung': 'Zerbrich den Kelch aus blitzenden Kristallen [...] / Von hochgewölbten Toren fielen Rosenspenden'. There are clear linguistic parallels between the two poems in the references to crystals and to vaulting; the tone too can be said to be broadly similar. The bathos of the opening fulfils a similar function in both of the poems. The lines from 'Aufrüttelung' evoke not only a certain literary style but also a whole set of assumptions which accompanied it, which are then shown to be hollow by the lines

beginning 'Da! Mordend krochen ekle Tiere'. In the same way, 'Konzert' starts with the description of an overtly beautiful state of affairs, which quickly crumbles to reveal sordid underlying realities which are ultimately inescapable, even in the most genteel surroundings. The idea is very close to that expressed in the following passage from Toller's partial autobiography:

Ich wandere durch den Vorfrühling des Englischen Gartens, Schneeglöckchen blühen, Krokus, die ersten Veilchen, an den Bäumen die jungen Knospen treiben im steigenden Saft, zart leuchtet der hellgrüne Samt der weiten Rasenflächen [...] Ich atme den Frieden und die Sonne, ich will den Krieg vergessen.

Aber ich kann ihn nicht vergessen. Vier Wochen, sechs Wochen geht es, plötzlich hat er mich wieder überfallen, ich begegne ihm überall [...] die zerschossenen, zerfetzten Kameraden, Krüppel begegnen mir auf meinen Wegen, schwarzverschleierte, vergränte Frauen. Ach, die Flucht war vergeblich. [GW IV 76]

The passage refers clearly to the general phenomenon which provides the basis of 'Konzert'. It is also interesting to note that, in juxtaposing the two paragraphs, Toller employs techniques which we have seen in 'Aufrüttelung', 'Der Ringende', 'Geschützwache' and 'Morgen'.

We shall now turn to those poems in which Toller began to identify the political issues underpinning the war. 'Leichen im Priesterwald' [AS 55, PBDG 279] has been examined in detail in Chapter 2 as one of those war poems published prior to Vormorgen. It marks the end of Toller's participation in the war after finding in a trench the unidentifiable remains of a dead soldier. Toller found himself unable any longer to maintain the fiction of a just and patriotic war having experienced its unjustifiable consequences at first hand.

The next poem, 'Alp' [AS 56, PBDG 279], criticises the false national feeling which was propounded in order to make ordinary Germans support the war, and it shows how a supposed national duty can contradict a wider responsibility to mankind. The national conscience perches over the slaughter going on below, like a carrion bird waiting to descend on the pickings. This conscience believes itself to be above (in the moral sense) that which is happening below it, but the description of its perch as 'morsch und faul' points to the corrupted nature of national conscience, and indicates its illusoriness. With the grotesque description towards the end of the poem, Toller demonstrates how national interest can militate against the best interests of individuals and of mankind as a whole.

The last line shows how men are lured sheep-like to their deaths. A similar point is made in different ways in 'Marschlied' and in 'Gang zum Schützengraben', without being related to the problem of the perception of national (as opposed to

moral) duty. The point is expanded in 'Soldaten' (see section 2.2.2) where Toller states of his comrades: 'Sie ließen sich in Fabriken führen und zu Maschinenteilen pressen'; here Toller indicates the capitalist motive underlying the appeal to a false national collective. The dance of the bones is clearly reminiscent of the dance of the skeletons in the fourth *Bild* of *Die Wandlung*, and if the poem was indeed written in 1916, then it may have been part of the preliminary sketchings for the play, for it certainly captures the essence of a *Traumbild*.

The other title under which this poem was published, 'Stimmungsbild', is appropriate inasmuch as the poem creates in a very short space an eerie and unnerving atmosphere.¹⁰ It is certainly the most offbeat of Toller's war poems, and possibly of his poetry as a whole. The poem gains in effect from the way in which it stands out from the others in the *Verse vom Friedhof*, but it is possible that its surreal and enigmatic nature prevent it from contributing positively to the fabric of the collection.

The next three poems 'Menschen', 'An die Dichter' and 'Den Müttern' [AS 57-59], all examined in detail in Chapter 2, show Toller turning from horror at the war to recognition and understanding of its causes, with a first attempt at an appeal for its cessation. 'Menschen' shows him applying a political analysis to war and stressing the aspect of the lack of humanity of nationalism. 'An die Dichter' is an indictment of those writers who incite rebellion in others and then distance themselves, and 'Den Müttern' reiterates the internationalism which he would like to see replacing warfare. The three poems lead up to 'Ich habe Euch umarmt', Toller's proto-Activist manifesto which will be considered presently. The *Verse vom Friedhof* thus far considered have demonstrated how Toller's war poetry extends from a highly effective sensual reproduction of the horrors of war, for example in 'Gang zum Schützengraben' or 'Gang zur Ruhestellung', to a more sophisticated criticism of war as a phenomenon of national antagonisms. The broad sequence of the war poems in the *Verse vom Friedhof* is apparent: from naïve social expectations, Toller developed through formative experiences to gain fundamental new social and political perspectives.

Toller finishes the *Verse vom Friedhof* with three poems based on his political and revolutionary experiences in Munich during the munitions workers' strikes. 'Über meiner Zelle' [AS 61, PBDG 280] and 'Deutschland' [AS 62, PBDG 280] are concerned with his time in military prison, while 'Ich habe Euch umarmt' [AS 60, PBDG 279-280] refers to his discovery of his oratorical abilities when he first began to speak at strike meetings. In Chapter 2 we have already alluded to Toller's first

¹⁰ 'Stimmungsbild', *Kunstblatt*, 8 (1924), p. 332; 'Alb', PBDG 279.

experience of public speaking when volunteers were called for to speak to the Chief of Police about the arrest of Kurt Eisner and Sonja Lerch, and 'Ich habe Euch umarmt' is an attempt to explain the provenance of this rhetorical power.

The poem contrasts two very different states of being. The first is the zombie-like existence of man under capitalism living in 'träger Starre, Leben lügnersch geheiß', a state not dissimilar to that described in 'Menschen', where people's masks are removed only to reveal 'Mumien oder Grammophone'. Women feature explicitly along with their implicit inclusion in the industrial proletariat: their 'wunden Schoß' is mentioned in proximity to 'fabrikgemartert', suggesting a link between the automated industrial process and the exhausting production of children, an association to be found also in the eighth *Bild* of *Die Wandlung* when Friedrich visits the homes of the industrial poor. Capitalism and industrialisation have taken man away from a state of natural harmony.

Man in such a condition is the 'Mensch', an almost Platonic ideal of humanity, of peaceful coexistence in a natural state. This is a condition which humanity must regain, but it requires articulation in order to be realised. Toller sees himself and his rhetorical ability as the conduit for this principle. When he says that the 'Mensch' has spoken to them he does not mean it literally: in effect they have listened to the 'Mensch', the common principle of humanity, within each of them. He has merely been the enabler:

Ich spreche Ich?
Sprach ich zu Euch?
Der Mensch,
Der farbige Ellipsen um Sonnenbälle fliegt,
Er sprach zu Euch.

This makes it clear that he has merely reconnected people with their more natural state, and should not be seen as suggestive of egocentricity.

The preoccupation with the 'Mensch' brings this poem very close to 'Aufrüttelung', the prefatory poem to *Die Wandlung*. The more extensive first version published in *Unser Weg 1920* demonstrates very close links with Ludwig Rubiner's poem 'Der Mensch', which postulates a similar kind of ethereal embodiment of the principle of humanity. The all-embracing figure in Rubiner's poem is described largely in terms of heavenly bodies and of the varying effects of light, elements strongly represented in the first version of Toller's poem and still present in the *Verse vom Friedhof* with the bringing of people to the light (the

recognition of their common humanity) and with the 'farbiger Ellipsen Tanz um Sonnenbälle'.¹¹

Like many of Toller's early Expressionist poems, the first version, with the longer title 'Ich habe Euch umarmt mit Flammenhänden' [APP], is over-ambitious and suffers from the attempt to infuse the poem with too varied a range of imagery. It is interesting to note that elements of the early poetry, synaesthesia and the profusion of light imagery, are embodied in the first version of the poem with no element of critical distancing, thus foreshadowing the rehabilitation of such elements in the Gedichte der Gefangenen. The Vormorgen version dispenses with thirteen lines, removing the most enigmatic and unnecessary lines along with a great deal of religious imagery, putting the emphasis far more on temporal salvation and looking forward in this to 'Unser Weg' in the Lieder der Gefangenen. Nonetheless the poem stands out starkly from the increasingly terse war poetry which precedes it and the more experiential prison poems which follow. Although it was Toller's intention to demonstrate a clear line of development in the Verse vom Friedhof, he does not achieve it at the expense of ignoring totally the less successful parts of his poetic development, and it is to his credit that he includes this poem in an otherwise far more sober context.

'Über meiner Zelle' also saw publication in Unser Weg 1920 [APP] before its inclusion in an abridged form in Vormorgen. The atmosphere of fear and isolation accentuated by the sound of the guards' boots is similar to the sonnet 'Schlaflose Nacht' in the Gedichte der Gefangenen. It also uses the idea of sound to intensify the separation between prisoners. 'Wird er mich hören?' refers not only to the act of hearing in a literal sense but also to whether the warder is receptive to the concept of common humanity. The prisoner's rejection by a little girl emphasises both the gulf between the prisoner and the world around him, and his status as an outcast from society. A child should be in political terms a *tabula rasa*, but her rejection of him suggests that she has already been influenced and implies a pessimism about the scale of the political task he faces if the younger generation needs not only to be influenced but also to be weaned away from society's preconceptions.¹²

¹¹ Ludwig Rubiner, 'Der Mensch', in Menschheitsdämmerung, ed. by Kurt Pinthus, new edition, Hamburg, 1959, pp. 273-274.

¹² In Eine Jugend in Deutschland Toller remarks positively about the attitudes of the warders in military prison: 'Die Aufseher sind kriegsuntaugliche Landwehrleute, mit ihnen auszukommen, ist nicht schwer'. [GW IV 97] The incident which inspires this poem may have involved a meeting between him

Apart from some editing down, the 1920 and 1924 versions show stylistic similarity. The opening lines, reminiscent of the soldiers' chant of 'ewig fahren wir' in Die Wandlung, are an effective evocation of the monotony and subdued threat of prison experience, and the compression of ideas in 'Nägelbeschlagne Schritte' makes it a striking phrase. The style corresponds closely to that of the war poems in the Verse vom Friedhof such as 'Gang zum Schützengraben'. The versification of the Vormorgen version makes clearer the balance in the poem between the dread and isolation of the prisoner and his desire to establish normal human contact.

The lack of contact with children is also one of the central ideas of 'Deutschland', which appeared in a longer form as 'Durch das Gitter meiner Zelle' [APP] in 1921.¹³ The first two lines establish clearly that the prisoner has no choice but to look out on normal life continuing, as exemplified by children at play. This moves by association to the idea of the prisoners as children of Germany in the sense of a parent for whose recognition rival groups of children fight, and who, like King Lear, fails to recognise its most faithful children, the revolutionaries. 'Deutschland' is not the Germany which is persecuting them but rather a notional or 'true' Germany, which its sons in the real world are striving to realise. The lines 'Deine Söhne werden / Viele Jahre / Nicht mit Kindern spielen' could be interpreted literally as the consequence of their confinement, but it also suggests that the political situation is becoming more serious, and that other objectives will have to be achieved before they have the leisure to play with children again.

The first version of the poem contains an element of internal monologue with the repetition of the line 'Seh ich Kinder spielen'. We have seen this suggestion of daydreaming in the context of an unacceptable reality in, amongst other poems, 'Sämann-Soldat', 'Spaziergang der Sträflinge' and 'Gang zur Ruhestellung', and it is curious that Toller should edit down this element in the Vormorgen version. The change of title in the second version reinforces the mood of depersonalisation by shifting the emphasis from the prisoner to the treatment by the nation of those who felt they were acting in its interest in their political undertakings. The two four-line strophes in the Vormorgen poem also emphasise this balance between prisoner and fatherland.

The section Zwei Tafeln comprises two poems, 'Den Toten der Revolution' and 'Den Lebenden', which are both short and direct. [AS 63-64] The first poem

and a warder's daughter.

¹³ Toller, 'Durch das Gitter meiner Zelle', Die Gäste, 1 (1921), H. 1, p. 38.

commemorates the fallen of the revolution, suggesting that their actions and reputations will live on and force the respect even of death. The final four lines, 'Wer die Pfade bereitet, / stirbt an der Schwelle, / Doch es neigt sich vor ihm / in Ehrfurcht der Tod', were part of the prefatory pieces to the Gedichte der Gefangenen in 1921. 'Den Lebenden' exhorts the survivors not to grieve but to accept the 'Vermächtnis' of the dead and to bring about 'die schaffende Tat'. The oppressiveness of the times, meaning here presumably the failure of the revolutions and the reassertion of the bourgeois state through the offices of reactionary military and paramilitary forces, is not to weaken the will of the living, who are to break down the gates to the future. The nature of these 'Tore' is specified in the final poem of the collection 'Unser Weg' as religion and capitalism, both of which in Toller's view in their individual ways estrange the working person from his or her immediate rewards.

The two poems provide a structural caesura in the collection and lend it balance. One half looks back to the past and is related to death and failure, while the other half looks to the present and to the potential of the future. To this extent these poems summarise the nature of the Verse vom Friedhof, which relate Toller's past, and of the Lieder der Gefangenen, which are concerned with the problems of the present and the goals which await him on release. In this way Toller interweaves his own personal experience with that of a generation, and it is this chemistry which accounts for his popularity in the early 1920s.

The Archiv der Akademie der Künste in Berlin holds an undated handwritten manuscript showing that Toller's original conception had been for Vier Tafeln. [APP] The balance is broadly that of Zwei Tafeln: the first two poems, 'Den Toten' and 'Dem Andenken Kurt Eisners' look back to the defeat of the revolution, while the second pair, 'Den Lebenden' and 'Den Künftigen' address the present and the future. 'Den Toten' is broadly the version published in Vormorgen, except that in the earlier version the 'Bund der [...] Bedränger' is described as *blind* rather than *roh*. This may suggest that the original was written around the time of the publication of Die Wandlung, in which opponents of the revolution are depicted as misguided or *verblendet* rather than as mortal enemies. The 'II. Tafel' is dedicated to Kurt Eisner, and its construction is broadly similar to that of the Chorwerk Der Tag des Proletariats.¹⁴ The poem begins with the 'Wehschrei der Sklaven Europas', making particular mention of the 'Finsternisse im Herzen der Mütter'. Despite the fact that working people are oppressed in all societies, nonetheless 'Proletarier zückte den

¹⁴ Toller, Der Tag des Proletariats, Berlin, 1920.

Mordstahl wider den Bruder', a reference to working class support for the war. The final two lines introduce the figure of Eisner, standing against this tide, holding the red flag, and waking the 'ins Joch Gebeugte'. In this way, he fulfils the role of the *Stimme der Ferne*, which in the *Chorwerk* encourages the proletariat to rise up against oppression and war.

'Den Lebenden', the third poem of the cycle, is, apart from minor differences, the text of the *Zwei Tafeln* version. This leads on to 'Den Künftigen', addressed to the future generations who will realise the goals of the revolution. The previous two poems contained religious references, 'die Botschaft der großen Propheten' in the second *Tafel* and 'die schaffende, heilige Tat' in the third. The final poem on the other hand is saturated with religious ideas and vocabulary:

Süß ist Dein Kelch vom Frieden der Menschen!
Reif Deine Fristen! O Psalmen der Freude! -
[...]
Volk der Verheißung, gesegnet seist Du!

The next generation is to be entrusted with a sacred mission, the fulfilment of the revolution, and the leaders and fallen of the revolution are by implication its prophets and martyrs. The employment of religious motifs to secular political ends has already been noted in Toller's *Gedichte der Gefangenen*, and was a prominent feature of his *Chorwerke* *Der Tag des Proletariats* and *Requiem den gemordeten Brüdern*, examined in the next chapter.

There remains the question of why Toller did not publish the *Vier Tafeln* in *Vormorgen* in his original conception. Once more we are obliged by the lack of documentation to speculate on the reasons for this. Firstly, the balance between 'Den Toten' and 'Den Lebenden' is a more concise description of the balance between the *Verse vom Friedhof* and the *Lieder der Gefangenen* than four poems would have been. Secondly, Toller published the sonnet 'Unser Weg' with a dedication to Kurt Eisner as the preface to the two *Chorwerke* in *Der Tag des Proletariats* in 1920. Each of the three parts of this collection is dedicated to a figure of the revolution admired by Toller: Eisner, Liebknecht and Landauer. The sonnet is a much more successful poetic commemoration of Eisner than the 'II. Tafel', and Toller's belief in the quality of 'Unser Weg' is evidenced by its reprinting in identical form in both the *Gedichte der Gefangenen* and the *Lieder der Gefangenen*, and in 1930 in the collection *Verbrüderung*.¹⁵ Thirdly, the essential structure of the 'II. Tafel' had been incorporated into and expanded in the *Chorwerk* *Der Tag des Proletariats*. Fourthly,

¹⁵ Toller, *Verbrüderung. Ausgewählte Dichtungen*, Berlin, 1930.

while religious motifs play a significant part in Toller's poetry, the 'IV. Tafel' was too suffused with these ideas to fit smoothly into Vormorgen. And finally, the first and third *Tafeln* were the most poetically accomplished, and fitted into Vormorgen with far less editing than the other two poems would have required. In this way Toller maintained the essence of the Vier Tafeln without prejudicing the stylistic accomplishment of Vormorgen.

Up to this chapter our consideration of form has centred on the characteristics of individual poems. With a collection edited to establish formal consistency this approach is clearly inappropriate, the more so because the Verse vom Friedhof (and perhaps Vormorgen in general) do not show Toller feeling his way towards technical improvement but rather demonstrating the mastery he had achieved. It is the overall structure of Vormorgen rather than any individual poem which conforms to the thesis regarding experience, articulation and reaction. Toller is here reviewing the experiences he has undergone, and in the case of his imprisonment was still undergoing, in order to place his life in perspective and to draw out those principles which were to guide his actions after his release from prison. The Verse vom Friedhof demonstrate the unnaturalness of war in two senses, firstly that of the absurdity of man fighting man, and secondly as an activity which breaches the essential harmony of the natural order. The first provided political understanding and the second a metaphysical dimension which has been seen in Das Schwalbenbuch and reiterated in the Lieder der Gefangenen, and these two ideas, the struggle for temporal good against the background of the humility of man's place in the greater order, were the abstracts intended to inform his actions on release. That the consistent application of these principles after 1924 does not show through unambiguously is a result of the changing and unpredictable priorities to which Toller was exposed rather than necessarily any lack of resolve on his part.

5.2 Lieder der Gefangenen

The first edition of the Gedichte der Gefangenen, published in 1921, contains 22 sonnets ('Der Gefangene und der Tod' counts in this as two sonnets), giving a total of 308 lines of verse. When the introductory poem 'Widmung' was added to the second edition in 1923, this total rose to 337 lines. The Lieder der Gefangenen in Vormorgen though run to a total of only 263 lines, and this includes a new six-line poem 'Nacht'. The question to be addressed at the end of this section is why Toller saw fit in the year between the 1923 edition of the Gedichte der Gefangenen and the publication of the Lieder der Gefangenen in Vormorgen in 1924 not only to excise 74

lines of verse from the collection but also to alter the versification of the majority of the poems and to edit most of the remaining lines, many of these significantly.

There is a slight reordering in the Lieder der Gefangenen. 'Schwangeres Mädchen auf dem Gefängnishof' is split into two poems, 'Schwangeres Mädchen' and 'Schwangeres Mädchen II'. 'Nächte' follows 'Verweilen um Mitternacht' in the Gedichte der Gefangenen but not in the Lieder der Gefangenen. The new poem 'Nacht' follows 'Gefangener reicht dem Tod die Hand' in the Lieder der Gefangenen and then 'Besucher' follows 'Gemeinsame Haft', unlike in the Gedichte der Gefangenen. In all other respects the collections follow an identical ordering. Such variations as occur do not alter the intention of the structure, that it should mirror a process of adaptation to prison life while demonstrating that it was beset with relapses and setbacks.

The editing of the poems appears at first sight to be very uneven. Five poems remain virtually intact as sonnets. A further five poems are reduced from their sonnet form to three quatrains, and three are reduced to two quatrains. Five poems are restructured to comprise ten lines, three of these as one single block. One poem is reduced to ten lines, but as two quatrains and a double line. The double sonnet 'Der Gefangene und der Tod' becomes one single block of twelve lines followed by three quatrains. Two poems are decimated: the original twenty-nine lines of 'Widmung' reduce to fourteen, and 'November' appears as a single strophe of only four lines.

Two sonnets survived totally unaltered through both editions of the Gedichte der Gefangenen and through the Lieder der Gefangenen, namely 'Pfade zur Welt' [AS 77] and 'Unser Weg' [AS 89]. In a sense both poems are programmatic, 'Pfade zur Welt' of Toller's pantheistic metaphysics and 'Unser Weg' of the secularisation and temporalisation of the debate concerning human welfare and destiny. So categorical are they in their statements that Toller probably felt they were complete as they stood, and that any reduction or revision would lessen the force of their arguments. The placing of these poems is strategically important in the Lieder der Gefangenen: the prefatory poem is a supranational appeal to political prisoners, the twelfth poem of the twenty-four is 'Pfade zur Welt', emphasising the centrality of its ideas, and the final poem is 'Unser Weg' which is intended to convey the enduring impression of future resolution and of a passion undimmed by the trials of imprisonment.

'Gefangener reicht dem Tod die Hand' [AS 84] and 'Entlassene Sträflinge' [AS 88] both maintain their broad sonnet form. Toller pared from both poems what he felt were unnecessary definite and indefinite articles and superfluous adjectives. A couple of minor textual alterations improve the poems: the overawed released prisoners are taken aback by the town in the latter poem, 'Stadt erschreckt sie', but

in the Lieder der Gefangenen this is made more graphic with 'Stadt umkrallt sie'; and in the former poem the expression 'keine Hilfebrücke überbrückt' is trimmed to 'keine Hilfe überbrückt' in the later version, in order to fit in with the greater simplicity of the Lieder der Gefangenen. That the versions remain substantially intact suggests nonetheless that Toller was in the main content with their original conception.

Taken as a whole, 'Schwangeres Mädchen auf dem Gefängnishof' retains its sonnet form. [AS 78-79, PBDG 283] The division into two quatrains and two tercets makes explicit the contrast between the impressionistic and *neuromantisch* language of the former and the sober, even brutal language of the latter. As has been noted in section 3.2.5, there is a contrast between the almost illusory potential of pregnancy and the sordid reality of childbirth in prison, and the use of elevated language to create expectations which are then dashed by poetry in more earthy language has been noted in earlier poems. It is interesting that the tercets are altered quite substantially and that the implied sexuality of 'Ich seh hinwelken deine Hüften' is removed to make the poems more objective.

Five further poems are denuded of two of their fourteen lines. 'Wälder' [AS 69, PBDG 281-282], as with most of the poems in the Lieder der Gefangenen, loses some adjectives which Toller clearly felt were no longer appropriate either to his purpose or to the stylistic consistency he was trying to create. Along with this poem, three others also lose their final two lines, but each to some slightly different effect. The final line of 'Nächte' [AS 81], 'Willst sie haschen, sind verweht', referring to the elusive inspirations which occur to the prisoner during night-time, is strong enough to stand by itself without what is in essence repetition in the final two lines of the Gedichte der Gefangenen version. In fact so confident was Toller of the power of this line that he detached it from the third quatrain in order to give it prominence. Similarly the final two lines of the sonnet version of 'Verweilen um Mitternacht' [AS 82] are rather vague and detract from the poetic evocation of the wanderer figure and the healthy antithesis in 'Wer in der Erde wurzelt, rauscht'. The final two lines of the Gedichte der Gefangenen version of 'Gefangene Mädchen' actually alter the tone of the poem away from a genial and harmless comparison between female prisoners and prostitutes by introducing an explicit and somewhat morbid sexual element, and this is absent from the Lieder der Gefangenen version. [AS 73] The two lines excised from 'Begegnung in der Zelle' [AS 71, PBDG 282] do not come from the end, but their removal does alter the balance of the poem. Toller's intention is to describe how the conscious perspective adopted by the prisoner can alter the hostile environment of the cell by redefining its contents as harmless things. The four lines in the original which introduce an admonitory negative element are reduced to two in the Lieder der

Gefangenen and rendered harmless by a fairytale phrasing. The tension produced by the suggestion that this redefinition is illusory is thus reduced in the later version.

Although several of the sonnets are reduced to ten lines, only one retains something approaching its original versification. 'Spaziergang der Sträflinge' [AS 70, PBDG 282] becomes two quatrains and a final two-line verse. There are a number of changes of detail, and some of these are very significant. In the Lieder der Gefangenen version, 'Proleten' in the third and fourth lines is exchanged for 'Gehetzte': under the regime of strict censorship imposed by the governor Hoffmann on Niederschönenfeld, a slightly less politically charged word may well have increased the chances of the manuscript of Vormorgen being allowed to leave the prison. The interpolation of the third strophe, as a prisoner drifts off into a daydream as protection against this hostile environment, is omitted completely and makes the third person perspective of the poem more consistent. Finally the 'rote Wunde' of the sky, reminding the prisoners of the bloody suppression of their revolution, 'will sich nimmer schließen' in the Gedichte der Gefangenen. However in the Lieder der Gefangenen the last line reads merely: 'Die brennt und brennt und brennt', emphasising the pain of defeat but not precluding the political optimism of the final poem 'Unser Weg'.

Even more fundamental changes to the argument are made in the three sonnets which are reduced to two quatrains each. The reduction of 'Schlaflose Nacht' [AS 67, PBDG 281] produces a more balanced poem, which in the first stanza concentrates on the isolation of prisoner from guard and the way in which sound is paradoxically a barrier to communication, and in the second stanza on the human communality which this experience is denying. Both 'Lied der Einsamkeit' [AS 72, PBDG 282-283] and 'Dämmerung' [AS 80] are merely pruned of the concluding tercets. In the former this has the effect of removing the negative and alienating intrusion of the day, reinforcing the positive potential of nocturnal solitude. The image which is left most strongly is the sexual implication of the yielding potential of darkness compared with the prisoner's hardening will. The reduction of 'Dämmerung' focuses the poem on the make-believe world the prisoner may now enter and omits reference to the warder entirely. All three poems deal with the theme of night-time, and Toller may have felt it a weakness of the Gedichte der Gefangenen that they perhaps over-emphasised this aspect of prison experience to the detriment of other areas.

Five poems lose the element of regular versification completely. Of these four are reduced to ten lines, 'Durchsuchung und Fesselung' [AS 68, PBDG 281], 'Fabrikschornsteine am Vormorgen' [AS 74], 'Gemeinsame Haft' [AS 86] and

'Besucher' (the latter to a nine-line block with the final line detached) [AS 87, PBDG 284], and one to eleven lines 'Mauer der Erschossenen' (with an opening line and a four-line strophe followed by a six-line strophe) [AS 75, PBDG 283]. All of these poems share an oppressive and threatening atmosphere, and contain many active images. The reduction and concentration of the poems (very much in the late Expressionist manner) bring about a stylistic intensification which accentuates these aspects.

In two of the poems the reduction gives Toller the chance to cull images he may have found somewhat exaggerated by 1924. 'Durchsuchung und Fesselung' loses the rather overblown classical parallel to Prometheus and the reference to sailors' mutinies throughout the ages. 'Fabrikschornsteine am Vormorgen', a dark and moody poem, loses the second quatrain containing medieval metaphors which over-extend the atmosphere created.

The other three poems are restructured in a more complex manner. The vivid and effective fifth line of the sonnet 'Die Mauer der Erschossenen', 'Vor Schrei und Aufschrei krümmte sich die Wand', is moved to prominence as a detached opening line. The rather sentimental description of the executions in the second stanza is omitted, as is the line 'Trunkenes Gelächter kollerte aus Bajonetten' which Toller may have felt subsequently to be too great a mixture of ideas. 'Solches Morden' is replaced by 'Weißes Morden', a more explicitly political reference yet one which a censor unacquainted with Russian revolutionary history may not have noticed. Apart from improving the ending, Toller also adds the line 'Mutter allem Menschenschmerz', which indicates the analogy of the *pietà* more subtly than the explicit subtitle of the Gedichte der Gefangenen version.

In line with those poems in which he removes effectively tautological lines, Toller omits the explicit comparison between prisoners and sick people in the seventh line of 'Gemeinsame Haft'. Having described the effect of isolation, Toller omits the final tercet which emphasises *Haftpsychose*. This aspect had ebbed somewhat in intensity by 1924, and relations between prisoners had improved as a result of shared suffering. Again in 'Besucher' he drops two lines, the third and the fifth, which now appeared rather excessive and which in effect detracted from the force of the poem. He replaces the simile of the visitor's eyes panicking like an attacked dove with the same idea as a direct image. He also removes the reference to the prisoner as 'Empörer' in order not to alienate the sympathy of the reader. The removal of the final two lines makes the last line, 'Und der Besucher friert, er kommt vergebens', more effective as a short interruption to the escalating description of the prisoner's flight into his inner self.

In 'Gefangener und Tod' [AS 76] there is an interesting blend of Expressionism and sonnet. The Gedichte der Gefangenen version contained one sonnet for the prisoner's view of death and one for death's redefinition of itself. In the Lieder der Gefangenen the prisoner's speech is recast as a block of only twelve lines, which is a free form reworking of the original first quatrain and first tercet. This restructuring accentuates the feeling of mortal panic in the prisoner, which the more contemplative sonnet form is ill-equipped to do. Death's sonnet becomes three quatrains, which retain the more lyrical and metaphysical tenor of the original. The first quatrain undergoes one line change from the original with 'Der wird den Sternen seine Hände reichen', but the well-structured and effective second quatrain survives practically unchanged. The final quatrain is an amalgam of the original tercets. The vocabulary which survives, 'Sinn', 'Formen', 'die Vollendung weben', 'dem Einen nahe', has been moved around almost like building blocks. The interchangeability of these ideas suggests that Toller was fumbling to express a metaphysical conception which he was ultimately unable to detail. In fact a third version of the poem published in the same year in Das Dreieck re-adjusts these ideas to form yet another constellation, besides pruning the rather weak prisoner's speech down merely to one quatrain.

The Gedichte der Gefangenen version of 'November' contains a whole variety of themes: the oppressiveness of the prison environment, the isolation of the prisoners from society, desperation as to when the oppression outside will end, the tedium of time passed in captivity, mortality and the soothing (if death-related) influence of night-time. Given the heterogeneity of topoi it is not surprising that Toller should seek to concentrate the poem, but in the event he reduced the entire sonnet to the second quatrain. [AS 83] Although this removes the link to the title in the original by the omission of 'Novembertage', the title can now be taken as a reflection on the failure of the November revolution in Germany. The compactness of the poem and its claustrophobic mood now relate much better to the poems in the Verse vom Friedhof, such as 'Alp' and in particular 'Stellungskrieg'. The opening lines of the latter, 'Alltag hämmert / Würgt dich', are close to 'Knäuel würgt die Kehle Dir'. Thus the poem becomes much more like the original conception (and title) of 'Alp', a *Stimmungsbild*.

The 1923 edition of the Gedichte der Gefangenen contains an introductory poem which in that edition was untitled [GW II 356-357], but which was to be 'Widmung' in a version published in the same year [APP] and 'An alle Gefangenen' in Vormorgen the year after. [AS 65-66] On 10 September 1920 Toller wrote to Netty Katzenstein of his concern for prisoners in other countries:

O ihr tiefen Zellen Ungarns, bebend von Elend und Jammer und wimmerndem
Weinen gepeinigter Gefangener! Kein Wunder geschieht.
Schreie Schreie Schreie. [GW V 45]

With the introductory poem he sought to place himself in the context of those imprisoned - not just for their politics - across the globe. The free form structure of the poem foreshadows the changes in the Lieder der Gefangenen but, despite its length, it is not a throwback to the excessively lengthy poems he wrote during his early Expressionist period such as 'Leichen im Priesterwald' and 'Mütter'. Far from being declamatory, the poem is written largely in a very sober style and contains the element of progression from the personal to the universal of the poems which follow it.

The poem unites and prefigures many of the themes and aspects which arise in the collection. Immediately 'Dämmerung' is invoked, combined with 'Stille' and 'Melodie' in a positive way, as in the poem 'Dämmerung' itself and in 'Wälder'. While his physical isolation separates him from other prisoners, the power of evening to enhance the imagination brings him so close that he can feel their heartbeat. He refers to the increased power of the will which seclusion can provide, as he does in 'Lied der Einsamkeit'. The prisoners, wherever in the world they may be, are 'Brüder jetzt eines Schicksals', as even the guards are in 'Schlaflose Nacht': 'Uns alle band ein Schicksal an den gleichen Pfahl'. Towards the end of the poem, Toller indicates his conception of God, 'des geträumten Gottes', and of the pantheism he has come to espouse:

Ich hörte
Den einen Herzschlag
Aller menschlichen Geschlechter
Aller Sterne aller Tiere aller Wälder aller Blumen aller Steine

Like in 'Pfade zur Welt', humanity is seen as one equal category of creation, not necessarily superior to an inanimate object such as a stone which, as we read in 'Gefangener und Tod', is merely another manifestation of life.

The second version of the poem, entitled 'Widmung' and published in 1923, amongst other more minor alterations omits the final five lines, the ones which expand this notion of pantheism.¹⁶ While the rest of the poem is self-explanatory, the ideas in this final line could appear rather quirky taken out of the context of the expansion of this idea in many of the poems in the collection. Toller may well have felt that it was more appropriate in an individual publication to restrict the ideas to the human dimension.

¹⁶ Toller, 'Widmung', Kunst und Volk, Vienna, 1923, p. 66.

The version which fronts the Lieder der Gefangenen, 'An alle Gefangenen', is reduced from the original twenty-nine lines to a mere fourteen, and this has some interesting implications for the ideas of the poem. As in the previous version, the pantheism at the end of the poem is omitted but also along with it any reference to God: in a political poem, a religious reference could be seen as a distraction, unless it is in the form of criticism of organised religion as in 'Unser Weg'. He also removes the examples of places in which others are imprisoned, as well as the reference to the detrimental colonial effect of European civilisation. Most interestingly he removes the explicit reference to the effect of social factors promoting criminality, which is to be found in the previous versions. By removing the social, religious and political elements, the poem manages to focus on the experience of prison life itself and its fundamental inhumanity.

In 'An alle Gefangenen' the most powerful line, 'Wer kann von sich sagen, er sei nicht gefangen?', is moved from its original position around the middle of the poem and given prominence as a single detached line. It is a line which is intentionally highly suggestive. In a letter to the blind poet Adolf von Hatzfeld of 27 January 1922 Toller draws an explicit parallel between his experience of prison and the poet's disability:

Wir haben seit Jahren Gemeinsames erlebt, ich glaubte tiefer als manch anderer um die frierenden Stunden ihres Kerkers zu wissen, aber tiefer auch um die seligen Gesichte. [sic] Leben wir ein wesentlich anderes Leben als die Menschen, die wähnen, vollkommene Freiheit zu besitzen? Der Unterschied ist eine Nüance, nicht mehr. [GW V 89]

Society itself, with its pressures and injustices, imprisons people's otherwise free aspirations. In another sense, the line also suggests that prisoners will never entirely be free of their experience, as one of the introductory notes to the 1921 and 1923 editions of the Gedichte der Gefangenen suggests: 'Kamerad, in jeder Stadt, in jedem Dorf begleitet dich ein Gefängnis.' Toller's own view of his impending release suggests another interpretation: in a letter to Netty Katzenstein of 12 December 1923 he mentions his fear of the outside world becoming for him a prison guarded by more well-meaning warders, leading to his becoming a hostage to the pent-up aspirations of other people for him and of their expectations of him. [GW V 171] Although written well beforehand, the line fits in well with the feeling of man as being trapped in his place in the universe through his own vanity and blindness which we find in Das Schwalbenbuch. The best poetry is capable of a wide range of valid readings, and the prominence given to this line shows that Toller was well aware of its force.

The Lieder der Gefangenen contain only one new poem, the six-line 'Nacht'. [AS 85] This rhyming poem comprises a quatrain and a two-line strophe and is

probably a sonnet not included in the Gedichte der Gefangenen - perhaps on grounds of quality or of the excessive repetition of themes - which Toller felt qualified for the Lieder der Gefangenen after revision. Even if this is the case, it is one of the less successful poems in the collection. Thematically it is consistent with the other poems: whereas the gentle evening is the liberator of the conscious imagination, night releases violent and desperate subconscious drives, only for the 'Morgengrauen' to reveal their emptiness and futility. This phenomenon is far more explicit in 'Nacht' than in the other poems in the Lieder der Gefangenen. The inclusion of the poem strengthens the importance of times of day. This and the seasons, which play some role too in these poems, can be seen as part of the prisoner's need to establish a framework for what is otherwise 'ein farblos leer Zerfließen'.

A strong theme in the poem is loss of innocence. 'Dämon', while retaining its historical connotations of inspiration and imagination, represents their ambiguity with its suggestion of the Devil and therefore of the temptation of Eve (and of Christ). The atmosphere of the dream is red, suggesting not just violence but also the indicator of physical sexual attraction, and the four lines of frenetic sexuality cede to wakefulness and consciousness of the emptiness of the experience, which we can probably take to be a nocturnal emission. The prison bars are depicted as madames who have brought together the prisoner and his fantasies, but who scorn the process they promote. The debasement the prisoner feels is accentuated by the cell itself, described as a *verweinte Mutter* weeping over the lost innocence of its inmate. Notably the poem does not mention the prisoner individually but expresses the experience in terms of the cell environment, implying that it is the circumstances of prison which debase the prisoner's sexuality, a factor over which he is powerless.

There still remains however the question of why Toller did not simply include the Gedichte der Gefangenen in Vormorgen in their original sonnet form. There are perhaps three main reasons for this. To begin with, we must remember that Toller adopted the sonnet for a particular reason, namely to provide a disciplined framework within which to articulate his reactions to prison life. During the period of sonnet writing he often subordinated his poetic instincts to the dictates of the sonnet form. Hence the need he felt in 1923 and 1924 to do justice to his original instincts in the Lieder der Gefangenen by pruning the language he had previously felt obliged to insert in order to achieve complete sonnets. This process in fact follows the logic of most (but not all) of the poems. Toller had clearly inserted lines, even created whole images dominating an entire stanza in order to fulfil the dictates of the form, and to this extent the ability to revert to free form when necessary was a release. The sonnet had served its purpose for Toller.

For the second reason, we need to consider Toller's affinity for Expressionism, which had provided him with considerable success in his dramas. His early attempts in the style, while at one with the breathless mood of the time in which they were written, cannot have been satisfactory for a poet who had achieved touching simplicity in the Gedichte der Gefangenen. The return to Expressionism articulates itself in both diction and structure. Definite and indefinite articles are included only where necessary, disappearing even from many of the titles, and there is a clear move away from simile and towards direct images. These and other developments produced a new but nonetheless distinctly Expressionist approach, as will be discussed below.

The third reason is to be found in Toller's attempt to produce stylistic uniformity in the Lieder der Gefangenen, such as he had done in the Verse vom Friedhof. The attempt to produce complete consistency obviously failed, as many of the poems survived in a form not radically different from that in the Gedichte der Gefangenen. While some of the poems were in need of editing, Toller realised that some had achieved a completeness as sonnets which he would have destroyed by imposing changes for the sake of consistency. There is considerable artistic honesty in this, because Toller was not prepared to disavow the sonnet form merely in order to portray himself as a more consistent adherent of Expressionist free form. Vormorgen is clearly an attempt to depict what Toller sees as a development of ideas, character and experience. It was not however intended as a documentary record of his poetic development, and it is quite legitimate for him to want to reflect in it the current state of his poetic accomplishment. In this sense, those poems included as sonnets reflect what he believed to be his highest achievements in that form. With, for example, the Verse vom Friedhof, dates are included which can certainly be understood as referring either to the year in which the events described happened or to the time of the first draft, which was then subject to revision.

If we compare the Vormorgen poems with the early Expressionist poems we considered in Chapter 2, we can see some very distinct stylistic developments. Obviously these poems are much shorter, but they are also considerably more direct and avoid the temptation either to apostrophise or to preach to the reader. Paradoxically, while they are much more concrete, the moral is much less explicit, and as a result the poems are much richer in suggestion - in short, more truly poetic. Toller also avoids the temptation to address large and somewhat vague concepts, preferring instead to allow more general themes to arise from specific observations. In the early Expressionist poetry the primacy of the message often led to the neglect of the medium; in the late Expressionist poetry Toller has recognised that the medium in poetry is an integral part of the message.

5.3 Other late Expressionist poems

It is tempting to see Vormorgen as Toller's farewell to poetry writing, with the prospect of his imminent release from prison and the challenges which this inevitably would bring. We must assume from the dearth of evidence to the contrary that poetry writing was at the very most an occasional activity for him in the years from 1924 to 1939, for there is only one published poem in this entire period, 'Die Feuer-Kantate' (1938), which we shall consider at the end of this section. We have however two manuscript poems which may have been written at the time of his late Expressionist poetry or even after, and the question of the expression of his poetic impulses in other genres will be addressed in the final chapter.

Of the three poems we shall examine in this section, 'Wenn ich weiße schmale Hände sehe' is likely to be the earliest. [APP] The opening lines describe how his mother's hands were, with the implication that they could still be so, were it not for the care and worry to which they have been subjected. The 'feine Finger' may be just descriptive, but it might also suggest that under other circumstances these hands would have been capable of more elevated tasks than work and child-rearing. It is not made explicit in the poem, but one can reasonably infer that Toller is at least part of the cause of the wrinkles on her hands, that he has caused some of the 'Leiden' and that her *sorgerfüllte Mühen* were for him.

In general, Toller's life and lifestyle must have caused his mother considerable worry, his spendthrift nature, his participation in the war, his time in military prison, his part in the Munich revolution and the ensuing manhunt for him, the premature reports of his death and his five years in *Festungshaft*. To cap it all, the mother figure is the focus of Toller's rebellion in the early poems and in Die Wandlung. The poem could almost be an apology written for the following passage in the play, which can only have been hurtful to her:

MUTTER: Ich habe gespart, um dich zu ernähren, um dich in die Schule gehen zu lassen, damit du es leichter hast als wir. Um dir dein wirtschaftliches Fortkommen auf alle erdenkliche Art zu erleichtern. Du mußt doch verstehen, daß ich mich als Mutter Sorge. Alles gab ich meinen Kindern. Nie gönnte ich etwas mir.

FRIEDRICH: Ach Mutter, ich weiß es ja. Ich möchte weinen, wenn ich daran denke [...] Was aber tatest du für meine Seele? [GW II 19]

While being considerably better off than many in Samoczin, the Toller family was not by any means rich. In Eine Jugend in Deutschland Toller describes how hard his mother had to work, and it must have been a source of some unease to him that for a long time he remained financially dependent on her and that he was supported by

her in a selfish search for his own identity and role. This scene from the first *Bild* and Friedrich's meeting with his mother in the thirteenth *Bild* would surely have been wounding to her. The stage direction at the end of the latter scene reads: 'FRIEDRICH: (*birgt seinen Kopf in Händen*): Mutter!'. [GW II 54] Friedrich is in many respects very close to his author, and this scene expresses Toller's guilt and anguish at the breakdown of his relationship with his mother. In a letter to Netty Katzenstein of 27 April 1922 Toller acknowledged the pain he had caused his mother and marvelled at her capacity to maintain her love for him:

Meine Mutter sorgt sich um mich. Es ist merkwürdig. Meinem Leben stand sie fremd gegenüber. Daß sie meine Ideen nicht teilte, tat mir weh. Ich glaube, ich ließ sie es fühlen. Nun merke ich, wie unwesentlich für sie jener Weg ist, den sie nicht begreift. Sie liebt mich. [GW V 101-102]

The dating of the poem is rather difficult. It is almost inconceivable that Toller could or would have wanted to have written such a poem while he still lived at home. He did not write anything as simple, unaffected and effective as this in all likelihood until Vormorgen, which was collated and probably to a large extent written in prison. A letter to Netty Katzenstein of 27 May 1923 supports this general dating: after being told that his mother was seriously ill, Toller applied for permission to visit her. [GW V 147-150] As he waited for an answer from the prison authorities on this, he described how shattered he felt by the experience and how unbearably oppressive he found the confines of prison under these circumstances. Concern for his mother and guilt at the worry he had caused her could have been the stimuli for the poem, and its suggestiveness, directness and use of image rather than simile make it likely it was written after Das Schwalbenbuch.

'Am Fluß', another poem from the N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv in Koblenz, is even more difficult to place. [APP] It contains a theme which occurs frequently in Expressionist poetry, that of the relationship between nature and the rise of industry and technology. The line 'Brücken rollen protzend Kraft' and the interaction of industry with the landscape is reminiscent of Ernst Stadler's 'Fahrt über die Kölner Rheinbrücke bei Nacht'.¹⁷ The saw mill and the bridge vie with their natural surroundings, the mill 'keifend zischt', the bridge vaunts its man-made power. The natural 'Gischt' of the tide is contrasted with the man-made 'stiebend Sägwerk', and its noise is 'keifend', at odds not only with nature but also with itself.

As a result of the encroachment of industry into the landscape, the atmosphere is threatening and dull. The only colours mentioned are grey, white and green, the

¹⁷ Ernst Stadler, 'Fahrt über die Kölner Rheinbrücke bei Nacht', Die Aktion, 23 April 1913, p. 16.

tide leaves things 'morsch' and 'tot', the hanging nets are 'matt', playing on the ambiguity in the word's meaning between dull and weary, the wave is dying, seeking 'Geleit'. In the third stanza the poet 'pans in' from the 'Weite' to the 'kulissenhaft' fog to the powerful bridges in the foreground. The sea is associated with dead things, the industrial intrusion embodies the life and energy, technology is replacing nature. The implicit optimism regarding technological advance is at odds with some of the war poems, where nature is shown to reassert itself despite man's destructive use of technology. Optimism regarding mechanisation is expressed by the Frau in the third *Bild* of Masse Mensch, and stylistically the poem is much closer to Masse Mensch than to the relative verbosity of Die Wandlung, arguing for a later rather than an earlier date of composition.

There is in fact a good argument for its having been written after his release from prison in 1924. It has been a feature of Toller's poetry throughout that he has explored either past experiences or issues that were current to him at the time of writing. It is not a characteristic of his poetry that he uses his imagination to place himself in situations he has not experienced. The gathering of the gulls suggests a sea journey, and there is no record of any such journey before 1924.

The skill displayed in the poem supports this contention. The metre and rhyme are controlled and regular, there is not a wasted syllable. There is real quality in the choice of lexis, with rich phrases such as 'Glucksen Schaum aus Plätscherlippen'. Where used, images are successful ('Nebel schwimmt kulissenhaft'), and ideas are succinctly expressed: 'Brücken rollen' conveys the idea of the thunderous rumbling of trains over the bridges without mentioning trains at all. This is amongst the most successful and evocative of Toller's poems. The staccato sentences evince the *Telegrammstil* of Expressionism, as do the syntactical dislocation and the transitive use of intransitive and normally reflexive verbs ('Eine Welle sehnt Geleit'). The successful combination of late Expressionist *Wortgefühl* and concrete, direct description make this one of Toller's best poems. No other poems of this kind have been found, so we can only speculate wistfully that there might be somewhere a cache of manuscript poems which establishes a sixth and even more successful period in Toller's poetry.

We have no such dating problems with Toller's final published poem 'Die Feuer-Kantate'. [APP] This short cycle was published in Moscow in June 1938 in *Das Wort*, the voice of those German exiles generally in support of a broad united front against fascism.¹⁸ The first of the seven strophes begins with an enjoiner not

¹⁸ Toller, 'Die Feuer-Kantate', Das Wort, (1938), H. 6, pp. 35-36.

to play with fire, while recognising that people are tempted to and that fire can be used to eradicate the traces of a crime. The second section describes how humanity tried to make a replica of the benevolent sun in the swastika, which then began to burn over Germany. In the next strophe the Communists are attributed by the Nazis with the responsibility for the new sun's harmful burning. The fourth part tells us of the decision to burn down the Reichstag and the fifth of the attempt to brand the Communists with it. In the sixth strophe the real sun reveals not just the devastation but also the guilt of the Nazis. The final section states that the Reichstag fire, although extinguished, will shine miraculously henceforth as an illustration of the initial adage that one should not play with fire.

The poem relies for its symbolism on the shades of meaning attached to the sun and to fire. The role of the swastika in this is central: it is a man-made representation of the real sun, and the disaster was visited on Germany once it began to be treated as the real sun. The *hubris* of this is underlined when the real sun rises to reveal the catastrophe, for the artificial sun 'brennt' rather than 'leuchtet', and nemesis has been visited on mankind for playing with fire.

The poem is written in a simple style reminiscent of a biblical parable, and is designed to work both as a cautionary tale in a general sense and as a reproach to the German people for having experimented with political forces it could not control. Ultimately though it works as neither, for the atmosphere of a parable is dispelled by specific references to Germany, the Reichstag and the Communists, and the politically critical effect is dissipated by the banality of the language and by lexical and structural inconsistencies. In the end, the poem suffers from being over-long and rather laboured, and from Toller's lack of resistance to the temptation to moralise. These are all criticisms levelled in Chapter 2 at 'Legende', one of the first poems Toller wrote in pursuit of a political end, and it is rather disappointing to think that his last published poem, though very different in form, seems in some respects to show little progress. Certainly if it is the case that Toller barely wrote a poem after 1924, then this poem would show the resultant ring-rustiness. However the enduring testament to Toller's poetic achievement lies in Das Schwalbenbuch, in Vormorgen and in occasional poems such as 'Am Fluß', and not in a poem written after a period of prolonged poetic inactivity and at a time when Toller's confidence in his creative abilities was low. The optimism in the final strophe, that the Reichstag fire would be a lasting example to the world, has a rather plaintive air about it. Set against the human catastrophe which was shortly to engulf the world and against the personal tragedy of Toller's suicide in the following year, this wistfulness was unfortunately to prove appropriate.

Chapter 6

The demise of the poetry

Five distinct phases of poetic activity culminated in 1924 in the publication of Das Schwalbenbuch and the collection Vormorgen, works of such enduring quality that they were reprinted long after Toller's death in 1939. Yet in the final fifteen years of his life he was to publish only one poem. After a brief review of his poetic development, we shall consider the reasons for his apparent abandonment of verse writing and describe the manner in which his natural lyrical urges found expression in his work in other genres. In the course of this we shall address the question of why verse, which had been a natural medium for him to evaluate and respond to his experiences, was no longer the appropriate means of articulation in the latter part of his life.

The initial phase of Toller's verse writing lasted until he saw action at the Western Front in spring 1915. His literary models in the earliest part of this phase were literary Impressionism, *Neuromantik* and literary *Jugendstil*, employed in poetry concerning love. Once his thoughts turned to war, he adopted the structures and techniques of pro-war verse and of drinking and marching songs. Ideas and motifs in this poetry recur in his later work, but it is heavily derivative. In this way, his verse paralleled his experience of life: lacking experience of love, he relied on the aesthetic treatment of it in early twentieth-century lyric poetry; and his conception of battle and of his heroic role in it stemmed from the reinforcement of chauvinist ideas by his schoolteachers. In both areas, the poetic models provided him with security and affirmation in the face of his lack of experience. The bitterness of one of his later love poems, 'Die Häßliche', written after his discovery of the more prosaic tribulations of love affairs, foreshadowed the searing disappointment he was to feel on discovering the reality of warfare.

The early Expressionist poetry, spanning the period from 1915 to 1919, abandoned the use of specific models, as Toller immersed himself in the potential of free form verse and the linguistic possibilities of Expressionism. It could be said that Toller began at this time to write his own poetry, using the medium to question rather than to reaffirm. His war poetry allows us to see his struggle to overcome the doubts plaguing him and, while he still tried to use poetry to provide himself with security, the texts themselves betray his misgivings. The nascent differentiation of his thinking is mirrored in the sophistication of his poetic techniques, such as association of ideas and internal monologue. His horror at the war and at his own participation in it was to be overcome through a gradually clearer and more active commitment to pacifism

and, in due course, to socialism. The bombastic verbosity of his early Expressionist verse reflects both the depth of his feelings and his lack of clarity as to specific goals and the methods of achieving them. The responsibility for this was to be abdicated to the Messianic figure of the *Dichter* who, having himself undergone the experiences of the war generation, would be able to reconnect people with the recognition of their fundamental humanity. This poetic paradigm of the new political activist shaped much of Toller's own actions in the munitions workers' strikes in 1918 and in the Councils Republic in 1919. Through his poetry and the play which was to grow out of it he formulated the challenges of his time and defined the nature of his own response to it.

The transition in Toller's war poetry from enthusiasm to rejection epitomises the change in the nature of war poetry in general brought about by the First World War. As Bridgwater remarks:

Whereas between the Thirty Years War and the First World War most war poetry was poetry idealising and glorifying war, from winter 1914 onwards most war poetry worth the title has been anti-war poetry written by poets in the line of death. This break with the heroic tradition was caused by the barbarous technology of the 'Great War for Civilisation', which brought about a change in the general attitude towards war and with it a change in the nature of war poetry.¹

Toller's war poetry describes this change in a conscious manner. The uncritical exhortation to war in 'Frühling 1915' became the ironic treatment of the marching song in 'Marschlied'. In 'Mütter' and 'Aufrüttelung' the comfortable assumptions of pre-war society were shown to hide the underlying viciousness of those tendencies which were to lead to war. This contrast between illusion and reality was to be the principal structural feature of Die Wandlung, which grew from and along with these poems.

The next three years, up to the publication of the Gedichte der Gefangenen in 1921, were given over to the writing of sonnets. With few exceptions these deal with the experience of prison, first military custody in 1918 and then the beginnings of five years of *Festungshaft* in 1919. The form reflects the narrowness of prison life but also the comforts and perspectives which this can provide. The adoption of the sonnet form was also in two distinct respects an assertion of discipline. Firstly, in poetic terms, the successful writing of the sonnets provided a corrective to the indiscipline of his early Expressionist free form verse, which was no longer relevant to a time

¹ Patrick Bridgwater, The German poets of the First World War, London, 1985, p. 1.

obliged to accept the dashing of the hopes of the revolution. Secondly, in terms of his own life in prison, the sonnet enabled Toller to articulate his experience in a form predicated on control, and the exercise of this control in his poetry was a model of the self-discipline necessary to cope with the vicissitudes of prison life and to enable his successful adaptation to it. Ultimately however, the mere exercise of emotional and artistic control was insufficient to describe as expansive a talent and personality as those of Toller. Few of the sonnets adhere to the letter to the conventions of the form, and in the same way his adaptation to the rigours of prison life did not preclude the expression of his individuality and of a certain inherent rebelliousness.

This nonconformity was to erupt in Das Schwalbenbuch, his poetic response to the negligent death of fellow-inmate August Hagemeister, and his attempt to describe his hard-fought positive perspectives within the figures of the swallows. Beyond all which the swallows themselves may specifically represent, the writing of Das Schwalbenbuch in 1922 and 1923 signifies Toller's challenge to prison life rather than acceptance of it. The Expressionist form of the poem is an integral part of this: Toller was returning to the fight, just as in the period from 1916 to 1918 he responded to his experience of the war. The form embraces elements of all of his verse and, in certain intensely compact passages, points forward to the richness and suggestivity of the poems in Vormorgen. In both life and art Toller was facing up to the challenges of the revolutionary period: in his life he was formulating ideals to inform his actions on leaving prison, and in his art he was working towards the controlled exploitation of the possibilities of Expressionist verse. The poem affirms both his will to live and to create.

The desire to find a fitting medium for the expression of his experience to date and his resolve for the future culminated in 1924 in Vormorgen. The stylistic evenness of the collection is itself a statement that Toller had achieved an overall perspective and a means of articulation which enabled him to put his life into context. The Verse vom Friedhof contain both re-workings of poems already published and highly sophisticated and subtle new war poems describing his war experiences with a numb, understated horror he had previously been unable to express. The section Zwei Tafeln and the Chorwerk Requiem den gemordeten Brüdern stand as his tribute to the sacrifices of the revolution as well as pointing to hope for the future. The Gedichte der Gefangenen were re-worked into the Lieder der Gefangenen, the stylistic changes heralding a change of perspective: they are a protest against prison life rather than an accommodation with it. Though not all of the revisions in the Lieder der Gefangenen are entirely successful, Vormorgen as a whole is a rich collection of

consistently high quality. The stylistic pendulum, which had veered between control and indisciplined expressiveness, had come to rest in a successful synthesis of the two.

This description of his development suggests that Toller had reached the peak of his poetic potential and begs the question as to how he could have developed from this point. The war poems published for the first time in *Vormorgen* avoid simile and through their very *Gegenständlichkeit* achieve a level of suggestivity unmatched by many other war poets of Toller's generation. 'Am Fluß', likely to have been written after his release from prison, suggests that he could have developed this style further, even beyond the generally accepted end of Expressionism, to enhance a highly distinctive body of poetry and to establish himself as an important poet of the period. Marcuse, discussing *Das Schwalbenbuch* in his review of the PBDG in 1962, wrote:

Man kann sich vorstellen, was aus dem Dichter geworden wäre, wenn nicht Krieg und Revolution sein Leben zerstört hätten. Dieser Zyklus gehört zur schönsten Liebeslyrik in deutscher Sprache [...]²

Although one could argue that war and revolution, along with prison, were the very impulses which provoked a poetic response in Toller and enabled him to develop, the general point regarding Toller's potential as a poet is valid. Given that it made no sense for Toller to abandon poetry at such a promising juncture in his career, the reasons for this cessation must lie elsewhere in his life. Before considering the extent to which poetry expressed itself in his other work, we shall put forward four principal reasons for his inactivity as a poet from 1924 to 1939.

The first reason lies in the nature of the life into which he was thrust on his release from prison. In his time in *Festungshaft* Toller published three entire collections of poetry. In the period between his release and his flight from Germany in 1933 - almost twice as long - he continued to write drama and increased his journalistic activity but did not publish any verse at all. In the final six years of his life, spent in exile, he published only one poem. The prison environment had provided him with opportunities for reflection and contemplation which he was seldom to enjoy after release. Just as these opportunities enabled him to write verse, a highly personal and contemplative genre, the pace of his life in freedom denied him the space necessary to continue and develop his poetry. After all, the outside world was eager to reacquaint itself with the most prominent political prisoner of the time. Even after his release he was to require conditions similar to those of his Niederschönenfeld cell

² Ludwig Marcuse, 'Einer der tragischen Helden der zwanziger Jahre. Wie kann sich der Revolutionär gegen die Revolution halten?', *Die Zeit*, 26 January 1962. This is a review of the PBDG.

in order to be able to write, as Dove points out based on an unpublished manuscript written by Toller's girlfriend, and in due course wife, Christiane Grautoff.³

The second reason also concerns the way in which prison isolated Toller from the outside world. The movement of Expressionism is generally considered to have been current during the second decade of this century. For example Kurt Pinthus, whose seminal anthology of Expressionist verse appeared in 1920, wrote in his introduction to the reprint of Menschheitsdämmerung in 1959 of 'Expressionismus des Jahrzehnts 1910-1920'.⁴ He then proceeded to outline the fragmentation of Expressionist poetry:

Die Zersplitterung ins Politische, ins Religiöse, in die sogenannte 'reine Kunst', ins Volkstümliche, ins Klassische, die Wendung mancher Lyriker zu Roman, Drama und Komödie mehr traditioneller und schlagkräftiger Art war eine Folge der Enttäuschung, als nach 1920 der Expressionismus nicht die erhoffte Wirkung erzielte und die ersehnte Wandlung zur Erneuerung des Menschen und der Gesellschaft nicht eintrat, wie auch des Einflusses der rapide erstarkenden Parteien rechts und links. [p. 19]

In the time capsule of prison, however, Toller continued to write Expressionist poetry, developing and extending his own range. While Das Schwalbenbuch and Vormorgen enjoyed substantial publishing success, it must have become quickly apparent to Toller after his release that he was writing in a genre (poetry) and a style (Expressionism) which were no longer current, as the writers of his generation diversified, or adapted to the *Neue Sachlichkeit*. Four years later than most, Toller was to join in the exodus from poetry described by Pinthus, turning his attention instead to drama and journalism.

This brings us to the third reason. On entering prison in 1919 Toller had achieved some success in publishing poetry, but was not known as a dramatist. Rapidly, though, his reputation as a writer of plays eclipsed that of poet with the publication and performances of Die Wandlung, Masse Mensch and Die Maschinenstürmer, with the furore surrounding the performance of Hinkemann and with the prescient comedy Der entfesselte Wotan. While his poetry was popular, his drama had made him a celebrity and offered far more prospect of maintaining a high public profile. After his release he was to be disappointed by the abrupt end to Expressionist drama and by its successor, *Neue Sachlichkeit*. In an article in 1929 he bemoaned the lack of significant post-Expressionist drama:

³ Dove, He was a German, op. cit., p. 197.

⁴ Pinthus (ed.), op. cit., pp. 7-21, here p. 8.

Die Generation der Dreißigjährigen, die Kriegsgeneration, scheint, im Hinblick aufs Drama, in einer Pause zu leben. [...] Die letzten Jahre brachten bedeutsame Romane [...], aber sie brachten wenig Dramen, die man als künstlerische Dokumente der Zeit gelten lassen kann.⁵ [GW I 130]

Toller saw a clear role in adapting the dramatic advances of Expressionism to contemporary drama, which he managed with variable success in Hoppla! wir leben (to be discussed presently). Toller continued to be an influential voice in German drama, although few plays were to achieve the success of his early Expressionist dramas, and pieces such as 'Vom Werk des Dramatikers' (1934) demonstrate that he viewed himself primarily as a dramatist.⁶ If he wrote poetry, then it can only have been an occasional activity.

The final reason for Toller's abandonment of poetry follows on from his conscious espousal of drama as his principal literary medium. In prison he had used drama to communicate his political and social views, whereas his poetry in the main took as its starting point the personal and sometimes the metaphysical. Drama was a more effective political medium and reached a much wider audience and often, through the controversies it caused, it provoked reactions even from those who had neither read nor seen the plays.⁷ The growth in support for the Nazis and the fragmentation of the Left made the use of his creative writing for political ends a priority for Toller, and thus he turned to those media which would provide maximum exposure for his ideas, in addition to drama therefore newspapers and radio. In a hectic life with such pressing concerns, the writing of poetry must have felt like self-indulgence, as it was to do for English poets of the 1930s such as Auden and Spender. The challenge for Toller was not to write for the ideologically sympathetic who found reflections of their own concerns in his poetry, but to reach out to and alert those who would otherwise have remained unconcerned about the dangers facing German democracy.

There may indeed have been other reasons for the cessation of Toller's poetry, but these four arguments provide a useful basis for the understanding of this

⁵ The original article 'Bemerkungen zum deutschen Nachkriegsdrama' appeared in Die literarische Welt, V (1929), 19 April, pp. 9-10, here p. 10.

⁶ Toller, 'Vom Werk des Dramatikers', Internationale Literatur. Deutsche Blätter, IV (1934), pp. 42-44. This is the text of a speech given at the First Congress of Writers of the Soviet Union, and is reprinted in GW I 178-182.

⁷ The briefing of Nazi thugs to disrupt performances of Toller's plays is described in my article, 'Audience disruption in the theatre of the Weimar Republic', New Theatre Quarterly, Vol. 1, No. 3, August 1985, pp. 283-291.

phenomenon. We return though to the central problem: is it credible for Toller to have suppressed completely his lyrical tendencies? 'Die Feuer-Kantate' has already been mentioned, and songs from his play Nie wieder Friede were published in German and English in the latter half of the 1930s, but these represent the merest fraction of his writing in the period 1924-1939.⁸ Yet we have seen close correlations between the early poetry and Die Wandlung, and between Das Schwalbenbuch and Die Maschinenstürmer. In 1930 Toller published Verbrüderung, an anthology composed largely of poetry but interspersed with parts of the *Sprechchor* Requiem den gemordeten Brüdern and scenes from Die Wandlung, Masse Mensch, Die Maschinenstürmer, Hinkemann and Hoppla! wir leben.⁹ We shall consider first of all if there are signs that Toller's lyrical dimension expressed itself in his drama after 1924 before considering whether poetic elements can be found in the other genres in which he wrote.

Toller's first play after his release from prison, Hoppla! wir leben, was premiered in Hamburg and at Piscator's Theater am Nollendorfplatz in Berlin in September 1927. Certain episodes from the play are reminiscent of poems he had written in prison. For example in the *Vorspiel*, in which the imprisoned revolutionaries await their execution, Mutter Meller tries to calm down the fearful Wilhelm Kilman and to make him more philosophical about death: 'Aus einem Schoß kommst du, in andern Schoß wanderst du ...'. [GW III 13] The idea of the universe as a womb of potential which recycles life is familiar to us from 'Der Gefangene und der Tod', 'Verweilen um Mitternacht' and 'Pfade zur Welt'. In order that they can attempt to escape through the cell window, Karl Thomas asks Kilman to pace up and down in front of the spy hole 'sechs Schritt hin und her' [GW III 14], a direct echo from Das Schwalbenbuch. [GW II 331] When discussing his memories of the seven

⁸ In England it was Edward Crankshaw who translated Nie wieder Friede, but W. H. Auden was responsible for the lyrics which, as Dzenitis asserts, are often a considerable improvement on Toller's German originals. Dzenitis is however wrong to suggest that Auden translated the songs in 1937, as his English versions had already been published in 1936, albeit under Toller's name: 'Noah's song', New Statesman and Nation, Volume XI, No. 277, 13 June 1936, p. 931; 'Socrates' song', 'Rachel's song' and 'Duet', The London Mercury and Bookman, Volume 34, No. 204, October 1936, pp. 484, 484-485 and 485 respectively. The remarks concerning Auden's translations are from S. Dzenitis, Die Rezeption deutscher Literatur in England, Hamburg, 1972, pp. 57-71.

⁹ Toller, Verbrüderung, op. cit.

years which have elapsed between his imprisonment and his release from the lunatic asylum, Thomas talks of beech trees which he associates with church pillars: 'Braun strebten Bäume in Himmel wie Pfeiler. Buchen.' [GW III 24] The same association is to be found in 'Wälder': 'Ihr Buchenwälder, Dome der Bedrückten'. [GW II 310] The final scene of the commotion surrounding Thomas' suicide and the panic of the warders is exactly that of 'Ein Gefangener reicht dem Tod die Hand'.

In addition to these direct correlations with poetry Toller had already written, the language of Thomas in particular shows an increasing tendency towards the diction of Expressionist poetry as the play progresses. When attacking Kilman in the *Vorspiel* for having begged for clemency, Thomas asks: 'Schlag an eine Betonwand, glaubst du, sie könnte je klingen den Klang entschlackter Glocke?' [GW III 15] Typical here is the alliteration of hard consonants, but the absence of definite and indefinite articles occurs at many other points in the play. Professing his love to Eva Berg, Thomas says: 'Du sollst mir Morgen sein und Traum der Zukunft.' [GW III 50] Thomas is an idealist who judges the present by his past experiences and aspirations, and as his adjustment to the realities of the Weimar Republic of 1927 becomes less likely, the language of Expressionism, the original vehicle for Toller's own ideals, proliferates in his speech.

One particular passage from the play possesses a poetic structure and poetic language, as well as correlations with individual poems. Thomas talks to two children about the cruelty of war, using as his basis the drawn-out death-throes of an injured soldier in no-man's-land. [GW III 55-57] The use of 'Schrei' and 'schrie' provide a reiterated structure to the passage, as ever more desperate attempts are undertaken to rescue the soldier until, at last, the troops are ordered to ignore the cries. Two shorter passages, punctuated by interjections from the children, draw out the supranational nature of suffering in war and then the need for revolution. Several phrasings would fit comfortably into poems: the soldier 'schrie wie ein Säugling schreit, nackt, ohne Worte'; Thomas expresses his wish for the children to understand in the line 'Ach, Kinder, vermöchte ich Phantasie in Euer Herz zu pflanzen wie Korn in durchpflügte Erde.'

Each of the following shorter two passages shows clear similarities to earlier poems. When Grete shows pity for 'Der arme Mensch', Thomas replies:

Ja, Mädchen, der arme Mensch! Nicht: der Feind. Der Mensch. Der Mensch schrie. In Frankreich und in Deutschland und in Rußland und in Japan und in Amerika und in England.

The international dimension is to be found in 'Leichen im Priesterwald' - 'O Frauen Frankreichs, / Frauen Deutschlands, / Säh't Ihr Eure Männer!' [AS 55] - as well as

in the 1920 version of 'Ich habe Euch umarmt mit Flammenhänden', which also stresses the primacy of the 'Mensch':

Der Mensch, gewichtlos, Licht, beschwingt,
Amerika und Asien, Afrika, Europa fest umspannend,
Der sich am Morgen in Platanenwäldern träumend regt.
In Deutschland einsam nächtens Wünsche schreit,
Auf Polens weiten Wäldern Sehnsucht stöhnt,
[...]
Der Mensch!
Der Mensch!
Er forderte den Menschen!
Er sprach zu Euch. [APP]

The second shorter passage contrasts the pathos of the fate of the individual 'Mensch' with the avarice and inhumanity of 'Menschen', people pursuing their own ends unaware of the communality of mankind:

In allen Ländern grübelten die Menschen über die gleiche Frage. In allen Ländern gaben sich Menschen die gleiche Antwort. Für Gold, für Land, für Kohlen, für lauter tote Dinge, sterben, hungern, verzweifeln die Menschen, hieß die Antwort.

The ideas here are identical to those in the poem 'Menschen', particularly the 1919 version. [APP] There people pursued activities, even war, in order 'nicht allein zu sein'. No-one has the moral courage to accept the pointlessness of their activities or to take responsibility for the harm they cause, and even when they are forced to acknowledge these truths, their masks lift to reveal deadened expressions. Both play and poems therefore share elements of diction, ideas and compositional similarities, suggesting that Toller's natural mode of articulation for these themes was lyrical.

Similarly, after chasing the student who has shot Kilman, Thomas gives vent to his frustration with and incomprehension of society outside prison in an increasingly poetic passage which actually runs into verse:

Wo die andern Nacht umfängt mit braunen Schatten, seh ich den Mörder sich ducken, nackt und mit entblößtem Hirn...
Und renne als ein Wacher durch die Straßen, mit Gedanken, die im Kegel des Jupiterlichts sich wundstoßen...
Ach, warum öffneten sie mir das Tor des Irrenhauses? War es nicht gut drinnen trotz Nordpol und Flügelschlag der grauen Vögel?
Ich bin der Welt abhanden gekommen
Die Welt ist mir abhanden gekommen [GW III 96]

As his hold on the world begins to loosen, his response becomes ever more lyrical, and his final words confirm this move to poetry, as the natural means of expression for the disappointments he has experienced, when he begins to reconcile himself with the prospect of dying in prison:

Keiner hört, keiner hört, keiner ... Wir sprechen und hören uns nicht ... Wir hassen und sehen uns nicht ... Wir lieben und kennen uns nicht ... Wir morden und fühlen uns nicht ... [GW III 115]

The idea of the real distance between people despite their physical proximity is identical to that in 'Schlaflose Nacht', the first of the Gedichte der Gefangenen and of the Lieder der Gefangenen. Thomas' final paragraph reads like a summary of the negative aspects of isolation in prison at night from these two collections:

Näher und näher rücken die steinernen Wände ... Ich friere ... und es ist dunkel ... und das Treibeis der Finsternis klammert mich gnadenlos ... [GW III 115]

Night causes the cell to close in on the prisoner in his mind, making him panic, and the cold is associated with his isolation from others.

It was the figure of Thomas and the language which Toller wished him to use which formed the core of the bitter disagreement between him and Piscator over the Berlin production of Hoppla! wir leben. Inevitably, the character of Thomas embodied much of Toller's own experience, and Piscator viewed the emotional identification of the two as a serious problem, as he described in Das politische Theater (1929):

Toller belastet eine solche Figur durch seine eigenen Gefühle, die unruhig schwanken wie bei jedem Künstler, und besonders bei einem, der so viel durchgemacht und erlitten hat wie Toller; das ist nur zu natürlich.¹⁰

Piscator acknowledged the need for dramatic language in order to heighten and stimulate the action, but nonetheless wanted the audience to examine issues and feelings 'wie unter einer Glasglocke'.¹¹ To this end, he found Toller's language excessive:

Eine schwere Belastung für den Stoff, den ich nüchtern, klar und eindeutig im Stück analysieren wollte, war die Sprache Tollers. Seine Entwicklungsjahre lagen in der Periode des Expressionismus. Ich weiß selbst, wie schwer es ist, davon loszukommen. Auch liegt mir nichts ferner als eine Ablehnung sprachlicher Verdichtung. Aber die Formulierung darf nicht zum Selbstzweck werden. Sie muß immer funktionell sein, die dramatische Handlung vorwärtstreiben, die geistige Spannung steigern, darf nicht in sich selber ruhen und sich widerspiegeln.¹²

¹⁰ Erwin Piscator, Das politische Theater, Reinbek, 1979, pp. 146-159, here pp. 146-147. The book was originally published in Berlin in 1929.

¹¹ Ibid., p. 147.

¹² Ibid., pp. 148-149.

Thus Piscator subordinated the linguistic texture of the play to what he saw as its dramatic dictates and the clear delineation of the political issues.

In the hectic few weeks which led to the first production Toller reluctantly accepted Piscator's view, but gave vent to his subsequent regret in the essay 'Arbeiten' (1930).¹³ For Toller, Thomas' language had been part of his character and thus possessed a dramatic function of its own, and the culling of the more lyrical passages had produced an imbalance towards directorial rather than literary dictates:

Ich bedaure heute, daß ich, von einer Zeitmode befangen, die Architektonik des ursprünglichen Werkes zugunsten der Architektonik der Regie zerbrach. Seine erstrebte Form war stärker als jene, die auf der Bühne gezeigt wurde.
[GW I 146]

He had also been piqued by Piscator's comments on his literary style and, in a note to the essay, adduces passages from the script written by Piscator which display a far more crass Expressionist lyricism than anything he himself had written. It is not therefore lyricism in drama *per se* which Toller is defending but rather its conscious employment to specific dramatic ends. As with his own poetry, the lyrical is tied inextricably to a function.

There is one final area connecting Hoppla! wir leben with poetry. The 'Diskussionsabend der geistigen Kopfarbeiter' in the Grand Hotel features a discussion between a chairman, a philosopher, a critic and a poet. Interestingly it is the poet who, after expressing sympathies with Marx, refuses to join in the abstract and nonsensical discussion and leaves. Toller's sympathies for a poetic view of the world emerge by inference from the negative comment of the critic, a highly unpleasant figure: 'Nach der Analyse wird er aufhören zu dichten. Nichts als verdrängte Komplexe, die ganze Lyrik.' [GW III 85] Toller's own positive view of poetry is implicit when the equally unsympathetic Professor Lüdin in his psychiatric examination of Thomas criticises his pursuit of happiness:

Der Glücksbegriff sitzt in Ihrem Kopf wie ein Staubecken. Wenn Sie ihn für sich pflegen würden, meineten. Wahrscheinlich würden Sie lyrische Gedichte schreiben voller Seele, blaue Veilchen lieben, schöne Mädchen [...]
[GW III 111]

While the audience was undoubtedly unaware of the background to these comments, it may well have furnished Toller with some satisfaction to have introduced his own case into the play obliquely.

¹³ In Quer durch, Berlin, 1930, pp. 277-296. Reference will be made here to the reprint of this in GW I 135-149.

A medium in which Toller was able to give full rein to his Expressionist lyricism was the *Chorwerk*. The first *Arbeitersprechchor* was founded in Munich during the Councils Republic, and frequent performances both of *Sprech-* and *Gesangchöre* took place until 1933. Bruno Schönlink, the most prominent writer of *Chorwerke*, recalled that it was Leo Kestenberg who had encouraged both him and Toller to write these works:

Es war Leo Kestenberg, der, wie schon so oft, auch hier Anreger gewesen ist, der fühlte, was in der Luft lag, daß die Massen ihrer Sehnsucht, ihrem Hoffen, ihrem Groll sehr künstlerischen Ausdruck geben wollten. Neben Ernst Toller und manchem anderen trat er auch an mich heran [...] ¹⁴

In 1920 Toller was to complete and then publish two *Chorwerke*, Der Tag des Proletariats (which gave the publication its title) and Requiem den gemordeten Brüdern, with the sonnet 'Unser Weg' as a preface.¹⁵ The latter *Chorwerk* was republished in an edited version in Vormorgen in 1924 between the Zwei Tafeln and the Lieder der Gefangenen. Toller was not to write another *Chorwerk* until the publication of Weltliche Passion in 1934.¹⁶

The *Chorwerk* was conceived as a new and entirely separate genre which gave expression to the concerns of the proletariat and provided encouragement in its struggle, by enabling the participation of large numbers of working class people in its performance. The texts were lyrical, but the emphasis in *Chorwerke* was on performance, bringing them closer to drama. This fusion was a natural form for Toller in 1920. The striking syntax of Expressionist poetry could be combined with compositional elements from his early dramas Die Wandlung and Masse Mensch, such as the antithetical juxtaposition of typifications of social groupings. The *Chorwerk* also combined the appeal to revolution with religious metaphors urging, as van der Will and Burns point out, the salvation of the individual in the temporal sphere:

Aber während der genuin religiöse Kult eine Erfüllung menschlicher Sehnsüchte in einer Welt jenseits der menschlichen verheißt, bleibt die mit dem proletarischen Sprechchor geschaffene Kunstform auf eine Verheißung im

¹⁴ Bruno Schönlink, 'Schafft Sprechchöre!', Junge Menschen. Monatshefte für Politik, Kunst, Literatur und Leben aus dem Geiste der jungen Generation, ed. by Walter Hammer, Hamburg, Jg. 6, H. 2, February 1925, p. 30.

¹⁵ Toller, Der Tag des Proletariats, Berlin, 1920.

¹⁶ This first appeared in Internationale Literatur, No. 4, 1934, pp. 3-8, but is more often cited from Die Sammlung, 2 (1935), pp. 173-182. This is also the version quoted from here.

Diesseits bezogen, die an den Kampferfolg der sozialistischen 'Gemeinde' gebunden ist.¹⁷

This accords closely with Toller's use of religious metaphor in his poetry, but whereas salvation in his early Expressionist poetry such as 'Der Heiland geht durch die Vorstadt' and 'Aufrüttelung' was to be realised through a Messiah figure, his post-revolutionary *Chorwerke* see the achievement of his political goals through the proletariat.

Der Tag des Proletariats and Requiem den gemordeten Brüdern (henceforth Requiem), along with Schönlink's Erlösung, were for a considerable time at the start of the 1920s practically the only *Chorwerke* of note. This is not to detract from their effect, to which a review of Der Tag des Proletariats in the USPD's Berlin organ in 1920 attests:

Es gibt nur ein Werk, das eine ähnliche aufrüttelnde und erschütternde Wirkung ausübt wie Der Tag des Proletariats, die in den proletarischen Feierstunden am gestrigen Sonntag aufgeführte Dichtung von Ernst Toller, und das ist der letzte Satz aus der Neunten Symphonie von Beethoven.¹⁸

The context of the piece is simple: the choruses of men, women and children are encouraged by the prophetic Stimme der Ferne to appreciate their own strength and to break out of the misery in which they live into a brighter future, this transformation being characterised by the contrast at the end between 'Masse' and 'Gemeinschaft', a concern which Toller was seeking to articulate around the same time in Masse Mensch. Clark's comments on the piece merit elaboration:

Der expressionistische Einfluß auf diese Chorwerke von Toller [he is also discussing Requiem], mit ihrer Verbindung von lyrischen und dramatischen Elementen und ihrer Grundidee der Erlösung der Menschheit, ist unverkennbar.¹⁹

Two points should be noted here. Firstly, although it was rhymed to meet the more traditional expectations of its working class audience, the principal influence on the diction of the *Chorwerke* is that of hard and elliptical Expressionist verse. The second is that the lyrical and dramatic aspects of the works support the idea that the writing of Masse Mensch was indivisible from trends in Toller's verse writing.

¹⁷ Van der Will and Burns, op. cit., p. 179.

¹⁸ Anonymous review in Die Freiheit. Berliner Organ der USPD, Nr. 493, 22 November 1920.

¹⁹ Jon Clark, Bruno Schönlink und die Arbeitersprechchor-Bewegung, Cologne/Fulda, 1984, p. 81.

Der Tag des Proletariats is likely to have been Toller's first *Chorwerk*, because the second in this collection, Requiem, is considerably more sophisticated. This order of composition is supported by the contexts of the two pieces: while the former celebrates the potential of the proletariat and the goals of a socialist society, the latter is placed unambiguously in the post-revolutionary situation and is thus a response to this defeat. The opening chorus of Requiem, repeated mid-way through and at the end of the piece, provides structure and reiterates the element of honour for the fallen. It expresses the same idea as the prison sonnet 'Die Mauer der Erschossenen': the earth, mother of all things, is soaked with the blood of those to whom she has given life. The piece then gains dramatic momentum from the clash between the views of the women and those of the men. The women and children describe the oppression before the revolution, but it is the men who perceive the opportunity for revolution and act on it. The men see the danger of armed opposition, but the women oppose their preparations for it as a contradiction of the aims of the revolution, thus embodying the pacifist tendencies of poems such as 'Leichen im Priesterwald' and 'Mütter'. The men, facing death after the failure of the revolution, acknowledge that it was 'Moloch' who had come 'zwischen Mensch und Mensch'. [p. 14] These male and female characterisations were to be continued in Masse Mensch, the male promoting the use of revolutionary force in the figure of Der Namenlose, and the Frau clinging to the humanitarian aims of the revolution.

This clash, central to Toller's own reconsideration of the lessons of the revolution, is resolved in the figure of Gustav Landauer, to whom the *Chorwerk* is dedicated. Fully involved in the events of the revolution, he faced death passively but with such dignity as to command moral superiority over his captors and murderers. His death was intensely courageous, but the nature of it does not of itself resolve the dilemma of revolutionary force. Toller does not dwell on this but introduces instead the Chor der Jugend, to be understood as the heirs to Landauer, who, while sympathising with the mourning of the women, express Toller's hopes for the future.

The form of Requiem is much more fluid than that of Der Tag des Proletariats, moving from rhyme to free form as ideas dictate, and the use of language is considerably more subtle and effective. It is not surprising therefore that it is Requiem which Toller chose to reprint in Vormorgen, because the adaptation of the text to fit the 'house style' of the collection was much less extensive than it would have been for Der Tag des Proletariats. The aim of Vormorgen was not after all to document Toller's poetic development, but to depict his personal and political progression in high quality poetry which both demonstrated the mastery over the genre which he had achieved by 1924 and allowed the reader to concentrate on the issues

rather than on variations in style. In common with the revision of the Gedichte der Gefangenen into the Lieder der Gefangenen, lines are frequently omitted and adjusted, but the main change is to the timescale of the revolution as Toller envisaged it four years on: the enjoinder of the Chor der Jugend to the women, 'Noch eine kleine Weile haltet aus', is omitted completely. [p. 16] Requiem fits in well with the Zwei Tafeln which come directly after in the collection, because they both deal with past and future. Der Tag des Proletariats, which seemingly ignored the defeat of the revolution, could not have fulfilled this function.

Toller did not publish his final *Chorwerk*, Weltliche Passion, until 1934, some fourteen years after his first two. After the seizure of power by the Nazis, the *Sprechchor* lived on only in a weakened form and for a short while. Weltliche Passion was probably written to counter Richard Euringer's Deutsche Passion 1933 of the previous year.²⁰ As well as reclaiming the *Chorwerk* for socialism, Toller's piece, with its dedication to Karl Liebknecht, is also intended to support moves for a broad anti-Nazi front from exile. While this dedication looks back to Der Tag des Proletariats, other elements relate it much more closely to Requiem. Both *Chorwerke* deal with the revolution's defeat as much as with its hopes. The opening chorus of Weltliche Passion is repeated near the end, and in between is a direct allusion to the chorus of Requiem:

Senkt die Fahnen
Fahnen des Kampfes
Fahnen der Freiheit
Senkt sie zur Erde
Zum Schoss der Mutter. [p. 180]

Both sets of choruses are broadly Expressionist in their diction, provide a structural framework for the *Chorwerk* and refer to flags, in the later piece those flying proudly over the peaceful and productive Soviet Union, referred to by 'die schwingenden Hämmer' and 'die kreisenden Sicheln'. [p. 173] Both *Chorwerke* also quote directly from the 'Internationale'. These textual and structural similarities suggest that Toller looked back to Requiem when he decided to write another *Chorwerk*, supporting the contention that Requiem was written after Der Tag des Proletariats and indicating that Toller saw it as a superior literary and poetic model.

The prophetic *Stimme der Ferne* from Der Tag des Proletariats becomes that of Liebknecht in Weltliche Passion. Once more there is a contrast between male and female views: the chorus of women, speaking in conventional poetic diction and using

²⁰ Richard Euringer, Deutsche Passion 1933, Schriften an die Nation 24, Oldenburg/Berlin, 1933.

simile, adopts a defeatist attitude about the ability of this voice to effect change; the men disagree energetically in dense Expressionist poetry charged with powerful and direct images. The use of the contrast between the conventions of traditional lyric poetry and Expressionist verse to convey the difference between false assumptions and reality is familiar to us from poems such as 'Aufrüttelung' and 'Mütter'. The poetic characterisation of male and female here marks a shift in Toller's attitudes from *Requiem* where the women, attributed with pacifist tendencies, and the men, committed to the use of revolutionary force, were treated even-handedly. Here the men are identified directly with Liebknecht, who embodies the acceptance of the need for necessary violence in the achievement of non-violent political goals. Liebknecht is apotheosised as a Messiah figure, leading working people but living amongst them, and his betrayal is described in terms of Christ's betrayal by Judas.

There are several similarities to previous poetic works by Toller. In the Chronist's first recitation the contrast is drawn between the constructiveness of the farmer and the destructiveness of the generals, an idea indicated in 'Sämann-Soldat'. This recitation of the horrors of war becomes a catalogue of adjectives and nouns, a feature reminiscent of the style of Toller's later war poems such as 'Stellungskrieg'. Near the end of the *Chorwerk* a passage of prose is inserted linking the deaths of Luxemburg and Liebknecht with those who died in other revolutionary struggles both in Germany and the world in general. The internationality of the section and, to a certain extent, its diction are similar to the introductory poem to the 1923 edition of the *Gedichte der Gefangenen*, and the insertion of carefully structured prose passages into poetry was a prominent feature of *Das Schwalbenbuch*.

In some respects the piece also looks forward to Toller's final published poem 'Die Feuer-Kantate'. The introduction of the Chronist and the generally somewhat didactic tone of the piece contribute to the creation of a parable-like atmosphere, not dissimilar either to the tone of 'Legende'. Although the piece possesses some adept poetic moments, for example the chorus and the poetic contrast between male and female, overall it lacks sophistication because its political function overrides its literary dimension, a tendency which also detracts from 'Legende' and 'Die Feuer-Kantate'. This *Chorwerk* was written little over a year after Toller's enforced exile and is designed, as Dove remarks, to reflect 'both the history and mood of the emerging Popular Front'.²¹ In celebrating the achievements of the Soviet Union, and in commemorating the dead of all revolutions and of those who opposed Nazism such as Erich Mühsam, it seeks to strengthen the broad front of anti-Nazi opposition and

²¹ Dove, *Revolutionary Socialism*, op. cit., p. 442.

to lay to rest the spectre of factionalism between parties of the Left. The piece conforms to two main features of Toller's use of poetry. Firstly, it demonstrates that Toller's best poetry is written from experience, and that when he tries to use poetry in a programmatic manner, as in his early Expressionist works, its quality suffers. Secondly, it shows that, ten years after his release from prison, Toller's response to political priorities and his understanding in particular of the revolutions were conditioned by having articulated his experience of them in verse, the place of the Messianic *Dichter* being taken by Liebknecht.

Drama and the *Chorwerk* are literary forms in which one would expect lyrical tendencies to surface readily, but these tendencies are also to be seen in Toller's articles, speeches and longer prose works. In her dissertation on Toller's prose works, Rogers identifies three principal phases in Toller's prose writing.²² The first, up to his release from prison, shows clearly Expressionist influence in its syntactic dislocation, use of ellipsis and parataxis. In his second phase, between leaving prison and going into exile, he moves away from Expressionism, the language becoming less introspective, with greater use of irony and studied understatement. In this way, his prose was a much more effective and flexible response to the political challenges of the later Weimar Republic than his poetry could have been. The final phase, while more limited in the themes it broached, was more forceful and sure-footed, based on rational argument rather than subjective and emotional reactions. While Rogers' division of Toller's prose writings is broadly valid, it will be demonstrated that poetic characteristics resurfaced strongly in some of Toller's articles, speeches and books written after his release from prison.

The most obvious example of an article of this kind, 'Zum 11. November 1928', is acknowledged by Rogers herself.²³ This short article attacks, from the perspective of its tenth anniversary, the failure of the Armistice to fulfil its goals. Its length and form are that of a prose poem, and Rogers lists the poetic techniques employed as repetition, parallel construction, single-line paragraphs adding emphasis, alternation between polysyllabic and simple words, and complex and simple sentences. [p. 226] These devices culminate in Toller's enjoiner: 'Gedenkt der Lebenden und was sie bedroht. / So gedenkt ihr wahrhaft der Toten.' [GW I 69] The essence of this

²² Jacqueline Rogers, 'Ernst Toller's prose writings', (unpublished doctoral thesis, University of Yale, 1972).

²³ Toller, 'Zum 11. November 1928', *Die Menschenrechte* III, Berlin, 11 November 1928, pp. 7-9. Reference will be made here to the reprint in GW I 68-69.

was to be re-expressed six years later in Weltliche Passion: ‘Denn die Toten ehrt / Wer dem Lebendigen dient.’ [p. 181] Both works are essentially a poetic response to a political issue, as Rogers states of the article:

Unlike ‘Reichskanzler Hitler’, ‘Zum 11. November 1928’ draws its strength from its appeal to men’s emotions rather than their reason. Through a poetic interpretation of political reality, Toller successfully produces a sort of low-key catharsis in the reader. [p. 227]

Weltliche Passion and ‘Zum 11. November 1928’ deal with two of the key experiences which fuelled Toller’s poetry, namely revolution and war, and it is poetry to which he had recourse in dealing with those issues a decade and more later. His response to Nazism, the effects of which he was only to experience directly from 1933 onwards, is either ironic (Der entfesselte Wotan) or prosaic (‘Reichskanzler Hitler’) but not poetic, because during the Weimar Republic the crucial element of personal experience was missing.

The presence of Expressionist diction and poetic structure can be seen even more clearly in two speeches given in the years immediately following his release from prison, ‘Rede von Ernst Toller bei dem Meeting zum Gedächtnis der Toten des Weltkriegs’ and ‘Deutsche Revolution’.²⁴ The former was given shortly after his release, and puts the blame for the war and its lengthy duration firmly on the lack of resolve of the working class. The speech begins quite objectively with a description of a firework display, likened positively by a spectating couple to artillery fire at the front. Toller describes his horror at this in terms redolent of his early Expressionist poetry:

Da krampften sich zusammen meine Hände, da wollte ein Schrei meiner Kehle
Beschwörung werden und bittender Ruf: Ihr lügt! Ihr lügt! Erkennt euch!
Erkennt euch! Von kreisenden Blendlichtern seid ihr berauscht, wieder
berauscht! O erinnert euch doch!! Erkennt euch!
Schon ward ich fortgerissen im Strudel der Menge, und es wölbte sich in
unendlicher Stille der gestirnte Himmel. [GW I 157]

The first part is characterised by unpredictable syntax and the appellatory tenor of Toller’s early Expressionist poetry, while the second introduces the element of natural continuity characteristic of his late Expressionist war poetry.

²⁴ ‘Rede von Ernst Toller bei dem Meeting zum Gedächtnis der Toten des Weltkriegs’, Die Tat, XVI, March 1925, pp. 912-914, given at an anti-war demonstration in Berlin on 1 August 1924. [GW I 157-159] Deutsche Revolution, Berlin, 1925: this is the printed text of the speech given in the Großes Schauspielhaus in Berlin on 8 November 1925. [GW I 159-165]

The next section indicts men, women and young people in turn, much as in Friedrich's final oration in Die Wandlung. The missing element in the lessons of the war, Toller argues, is the acceptance of co-responsibility, and his appeal is expressed once more in the vocabulary and style of the early Expressionist war poetry:

Kameraden! denkt zurück! hört ihr im Drahtverhau schreien den hilflos Sterbenden? Fühlt ihr die klagende Stille gemordeter Wälder? Hört ihr das dumpfe Gebrüll verlassener Tiere? Menschen, Tiere, Wälder - gemordet! gemordet! gemordet! [GW I 158]

Toller enhances the emotional power of this indictment by depicting the isolation of the revolutionaries, and accuses the proletariat of allowing a war of attrition by the ruling classes against working people to begin. As in early Expressionist poems such as 'Aufrüttelung' and 'Mütter', Toller seeks to demonstrate that the basis on which working people have viewed these issues is false:

Das Fundament, das euch trägt, ward pestend vom Verwesungshauch der Leiber, die geopfert wurden gleißender Lüge, goldsüchtigem Gierwillen, der sich hüllt in die Toga vaterländischer Prunkworte. [GW I 159]

It is easy to imagine this passage restructured into free form verse and fitting in seamlessly with the style of his early Expressionist poetry. It is significant that, in order to accuse and arouse his audience, Toller should return to the style which shaped the articulation of his ideas in the latter stages of the war.

Fifteen months later Toller was to address another important personal concern, the revolution, in the speech 'Deutsche Revolution'. Where the previous speech began gently but became a harangue, this speech starts in a declamatory manner but then mixes argument and emotional appeal, the latter expressed in a more sober, simple style closer to that of the late Expressionist poems. The revolution has become institutionalised as a sentimental acknowledgement of defeat:

Erlöschen der Atem Eures kurzen allzukurzen Aufschwungs. Gelähmt, mutlos, ohne Vertrauen trottet Ihr - und Sozialismus, Revolution wurden bunte Flitter, die den Festtag verschönen, hinwelkend schon in der Nacht zum Alltag. [GW I 160]

The revolution has become 'eine Mumie', an image from the poem 'Menschen'. Toller's treatment of the proletariat is much gentler in this speech, stressing their lack of self-confidence in the face of the challenge of assuming power. This timidity encouraged the ruling classes to maintain their control over society. Revolutionary acts lacked the 'Geist der Gemeinschaft', as splinter groups fought each other and not the real enemy: 'Eine Revolution, der der Geist fehlt, gleicht einer Flamme, die jäh auflodert um ziellos zu verflackern, weil ihr die nährnde Kraft mangelt.' [GW I 162] Toller's ideals of revolution, inherited from Eisner and Landauer, are expressed in terms of a poetic image close in tenor to those of the Gedichte der Gefangenen.

Opposed to the strengthening bourgeoisie is socialism, which is beginning to spread and which is growing in the hearts of youth, to whom in particular Toller appeals to maintain its belief: 'Ermattet nicht in den Zeiten, da das Kummer der Not Euch drückt und sehr einsam macht. / Lasset Euch nicht einschläfern von taubem Geschrei [...]'. [GW I 164] Ultimately, the proletariat must take a conscious decision for subservience or for freedom:

Wähle, Proletariat!

Du bist die Knechtschaft: schwach und verblendet.

Du bist die Freiheit: wissend, wollend und gläubig.

Entscheide Dich! [GW I 165]

The final challenge is expressed in a parallel construction which describes, in a poetic structure, the dual potential of the proletariat. Although the speech as a whole is more reasoned and cogently argued than the previous one, Toller employs poetic techniques at points of emphasis, because for him it is the natural style of political rhetoric.

Speeches are, of course, a performance medium and thus could be expected to be somewhat lyrical, to rely for their force on emotive power rather than purely on argumentation. Yet there are poetic characteristics, albeit of differing kinds, in Toller's longer prose works, Eine Jugend in Deutschland and the Briefe aus dem Gefängnis. Although sketches from the former had been published beforehand, the work as a whole was published from exile in 1933.²⁵ The episodic and fragmented composition of the book suggest that it was compiled from a number of sources and knitted into a whole by Toller. Naturally enough it contains themes which occur in the poetry, for many of these were so fundamental to Toller's development that their inclusion was inevitable. It is however the lyrical phrasing of some passages which suggests that they may have been recomposed from the poetry, and it comes as little surprise that this tendency is most in evidence when Toller is writing about the war.

For example, Toller describes the scene of devastation in the Bois-le-Prêtre during the First World War:

Zerschossener Wald, zwei armselige Worte. Ein Baum ist wie ein Mensch. Die Sonne bescheint ihn, er hat Wurzeln, die Wurzeln stecken in Erde, der Regen wässert sie, die Winde streichen über sein Geäst, er wächst, er stirbt, wir wissen wenig von seinem Wachsen und noch weniger von seinem Sterben. Dem Herbststurm neigt er sich wie seiner Erfüllung, aber es ist nicht der Tod, der kommt, sondern der sammelnde Schlaf des Winters.

²⁵ Toller, Eine Jugend in Deutschland, Amsterdam, 1933. Quotations are taken from Volume IV of the GW which stays true to this edition in all essential respects.

Ein Wald ist ein Volk. Ein zerschossener Wald ist ein gemeucheltes Volk.
Die gliedlosen Stümpfe stehen schwarz im Tag, und auch die erbarmende
Nacht verhüllt sie nicht, selbst die Winde streichen fremd über sie hinweg.
[GW IV 64]

The poetic techniques are clearly evident. Once Toller introduces the simile of the tree and a person, he develops it consistently through the passage, escalating from the roots to the wider ideas of life and death. The accumulation of short main clauses underlines the logic of the image which, in a second paragraph, is then expanded to compare a wood with a whole people. The final sentence in each paragraph is in three main parts, like the tercet of a sonnet, and indeed the language used in these concluding sentences is similar to that of the Gedichte der Gefangenen. Two of the three main ideas of the passage are familiar from the prison sonnets: the view of death as a form of regeneration is from 'Der Gefangene und der Tod', and the inability of night fully to cloak uncomfortable realities is from, amongst others, 'Lied der Einsamkeit', while in 'Der Entwurzelte', a much earlier poem, the third idea, that of the well-rooted tree, is used to indicate successful social integration. In previous chapters we have examined the close linguistic linkage between passages from Eine Jugend in Deutschland and other poems, for example 'Leichen im Priesterwald', 'Sämann-Soldat' and 'Konzert', all similarly dealing with the war or its psychological aftermath. Toller's recollections in prose of this experience in particular is conditioned even in exile by the poetry which first articulated it.

Direct textual parallels with the poetry are much more obvious and frequent in the Briefe aus dem Gefängnis.²⁶ Many of the letters were written at the time of composition of the poems and demonstrate the manner in which this lyricism spilled over into Toller's correspondence. This cross-fertilisation, however, was contemporaneous. A poetic dimension added later lies in the overall structure of the collection. Although he does little to substantiate his claims of falsification and *ex post facto* editing of the Briefe aus dem Gefängnis, Frühwald does make some useful comments on Toller's structuring of the collection. The letters are arranged to document the history of the Weimar Republic from the revolutions to the rise of National Socialism, and the initial letter of each chapter is intended to announce the general theme of that year's events, both inside and outside prison. The writing and

²⁶ Toller, Briefe aus dem Gefängnis, Amsterdam, 1935. Quotations are taken from Volume V of the GW, which follows this edition.

performance of his plays, as well as the reactions of the prison authorities, provide an almost dramatic structure.²⁷

There are, however, also direct parallels with the structure of the Gedichte der Gefangenen and, to a certain extent, of Das Schwalbenbuch. Both the Gedichte der Gefangenen and the Briefe aus dem Gefängnis begin in an atmosphere of fear: the first two sonnets are 'Schlaflose Nacht' and 'Durchsuchung und Fesselung', while the first letter dealing with prison conditions concerns Toller's fear of being shot in a trap laid by guards to make it appear that he was escaping. [GW V 13-14] Both collections finish on an optimistic note for the future: the letters of 1924 contain barely a reference to prison conditions and generally concern Toller's plans for his release, and in the same way 'Entlassene Sträflinge' and 'Unser Weg' in the sonnet cycle look forward to the pleasures and challenges of life after prison. The internal rhythm of the works is also similar, relying for its effect on the generation of hope and on the disillusionments which follow.

While this general strategy provides the dramatic tension in the works and mirrors the vicissitudes of prison life, overall a pattern of gradual adjustment emerges. The basis of this adjustment is a re-evaluation of prison life through which Toller begins to value experiences he had previously overlooked and to learn to exploit the contemplative potential of prison life. The final letter of one chapter and the initial letter of the next provide a structure for this. 1920 ends on a note of depression over prison conditions, whereas 1921 begins with the determination to mature in prison. 1921 ends with a statement on the bitter-sweet potential of prison, while the start of 1922 points to its potential for widening Toller's intellectual horizons. The end of 1922 links with the start of 1923 in the parallel of the personal confinement of prison and political repression outside. The death of August Hagemeister early in 1923 produces a proliferation of letters in which Toller observes nature and in particular the behaviour of the swallows. The gradual recuperation through the year from thoughts of death to a new perspective on the outside world, effected through the restorative capacity of nature, is precisely that of Das Schwalbenbuch. The final letter of the year makes explicit Toller's retreat into contemplation as the tactic necessary for surviving prison, while 1924 begins with a letter about Hitler which signals the orientation towards outside which becomes evident in the chapter. In this way, the structure of the Briefe aus dem Gefängnis takes on the main structural features of the earlier sonnet cycle as the best way to present and articulate the experience of prison:

²⁷ Frühwald, 'Exil als Ausbruchsversuch', op. cit., pp. 494-495.

once more, the poetry has created a frame of reference for experience which suggests itself naturally to Toller when articulating that experience.

This survey of works with clear lyrical characteristics is obviously far from exhaustive and suggests many questions beyond the brief of the current thesis. It does however make two main points. Firstly, while Toller effectively ceased to write poems, his poetic tendencies still found expression through direct textual parallels with poems, similarities of theme and diction, his continued use of the language of Expressionist poetry and structural features from his collections of poetry. Secondly, intense personal experiences such as war, revolution and prison continued to find some measure of poetic articulation long after he had ceased writing poetry on these themes. Poetry, and Expressionist poetry in particular, were not so much styles to him as ways of seeing. The subsequent articulation of these experiences was thus lyrically conditioned: the medium he had turned to as the only adequate one to articulate the depth of his response continued to shape his reactions until his death. The experiences moved him to poetry, and it is through this medium that he continued to relive them.

It can only be a cause of regret that poetry was confined to one discrete phase of Toller's life. In this he joins many writers about whose future exploits we can now only speculate. Death did not take away his poetry, but rather the gravity of the times and, in a sense, Toller's own courage and self-denial in his relentless opposition to the barbarism of Hitler. Poetry could not stem the tide of Nazism, but Toller's personal commitment to the struggle against fascism contributed to the restoration of a Germany in which poetry could once more freely be written. The sacrifice of the development of his poetry in the interests of responding to the political dictates of the late Weimar Republic and of the Third Reich has robbed the world of a suitable poetic epitaph from Toller's own hand. It was W. H. Auden who, in his tribute to Toller, perceived the subtle relationships in his poetry, from the burning sense of social justice which drove his early poetry to the philosophical calmness of the prison sonnets and the irrepressible vitality of the swallows:

What was it, Ernst, that your shadow unwittingly said?
Did the small child see something horrid in the woodshed
Long ago? Or had the Europe which took refuge in your head

Already been too injured to get well?
For just how long, like the swallows in that other cell,
Had the bright little longings been flying in to tell

About the big and friendly death outside,
Where people do not occupy or hide;
No towns like Munich; no need to write?

Dear Ernst, lie shadowless at last among
The other war-horses who existed till they'd done
Something that was an example to the young.²⁸

²⁸ W. H. Auden, 'In memory of Ernst Toller', Collected poems, ed. by Edward Mendelson, London, 1976, pp. 198-199.

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Appendix 1

Alphabetical list of Toller's poetry

The following is an alphabetical list of Toller's individual poems. The list does not include parts of Das Schwalbenbuch which Toller published as individual poems; nor does it include the *Sprechchöre* or reprinted parts of dramatic works such as Die Wandlung, with the exception of the prefatory poem 'Aufrüttelung' which is clearly intended to be understood as a poem in itself.

The entries are constructed as follows. The first line gives the name and version of the poem: 'Begegnung in der Zelle' (2/3) is the second of the three substantive versions of that poem. Poems denoted (-/-) exist only in one form. Titles in square brackets are working titles for originally untitled poems. The second line of the entry gives the poem's first line, or the first two lines if the initial line is very short. The third line gives details of its first publication or states whether it is unpublished and, if so, in which archive it is held. There may then follow numbered observations on the poem. The final line shows where the poem is to be found in the Ausgewählte Schriften, the Gesammelte Werke or the Prosa Briefe Dramen Gedichte, or it indicates if the version is to be found in Appendix 2.

A

'Abend am Bodensee' (-/-)
In roten Wellenbändern fließen Sonnenstrahlen
Die Bücherkiste, 1 (1919/20), H. 5/6/7, p. 66.
APP.

'Abend am Welssee' (-/-)
Den Eichenwald umgittern lächelnd Birken
Unpublished (N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz).
1. Undated in the original.
APP.

'Am Fluß' (-/-)
Schneller wirbeln grüne Kreise,
Unpublished (N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz).
1. Undated in the original.
APP.

'Alp' (1/2)
Auf einer Stange morsch und faul
Vormorgen (1924) Verse vom Friedhof.
1. Also published under the title 'Stimmungsbild' in 1924.
2. Appears in AS 56 as 'Alb'.
3. In Vormorgen dated 1916.
AS 56, PBDG 279.

‘An alle Gefangenen’ (3/3)

Dämmerung, Schwester der Gefangenen,
Vormorgen (1924) Lieder der Gefangenen.

1. Two earlier versions published as ‘Widmung’.
AS 65.

‘An die Dichter’ (2/3)

Anklag ich Euch, Ihr Dichter,
Vormorgen (1924) Verse vom Friedhof.

1. In Vormorgen dated 1917.
2. See also ‘Anklag ich Euch’.
AS 58.

‘An die Dichter’ (3/3)

Anklag ich Euch, Ihr Blutschuldträger,
Kunstblatt, 8 (1924), p. 332.

1. See also ‘Anklag ich Euch’.
APP.

‘An die Sprache’ (-/-)

Sprache, / Gefäß göttlichen Geistes.
Die Aktion, 8 (1918), p. 297.

APP.

‘Dem Andenken Kurt Eisners’ (II. Tafel) (-/-)

Wehschrei der Sklaven Europas zerschrillte die Erde,
Unpublished (Archiv der Akademie der Künste Berlin).

1. The second of four poems probably entitled ‘Vier Tafeln’.
2. Undated in the original.
3. The only one of the ‘Vier Tafeln’ on the MS sheet to have been crossed through.
APP.

‘Anklag ich Euch’ (1/3)

Anklag ich Euch, Ihr Blutschuldträger,
Das Tribunal, 1 (1919), p. 113.

1. See ‘An die Dichter’.
APP.

[‘Auf, erwacht!’]

Auf, erwacht!
Eine Jugend in Deutschland, Amsterdam, 1935.

1. Published by Toller only in Eine Jugend in Deutschland.
2. According to Toller, written during his time at the Realgymnasium in Bromberg (1906-1913).
GW IV 29.

‘Aufrüttelung’ (-/-)

Zerbrich den Kelch aus blitzenden Kristallen,

Die Wandlung, Potsdam, 1919.

1. A version in the Fritz-Claus-Nachlaß in Marbach am Neckar substitutes ‘blitzend’ for ‘blinzelnd’ in line 10.

GW II 9, PBDG 78.

‘Aus den Erläuterungen des Bundesrats zum Gesetz über den Vaterländischen Hilfsdienst’ (-/-)

Gedenkt des Worts.

Unpublished (N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz).

1. This is the first line of the poem, although a quote precedes it.

2. Dated in pencil ‘1915 oder 1916’.

APP.

‘Auswendig lernen’ (-/-)

Wir Männer, die wir nach fünf Jahren,

Die Weltbühne, 17 II (1921), p. 205.

1. Composed as a skit on a poem by Börries Freiherr von Münchhausen.

APP.

B

‘Begegnung in der Zelle’ (1/3)

Die Dinge, die wie Feinde zu dir schauen,

Der Freihafen, 4 (1921), p. 37.

APP.

‘Begegnung in der Zelle’ (2/3)

Die Dinge, die erst feindlich zu dir schauen,

Gedichte der Gefangenen (1921).

GW II 311.

‘Begegnung in der Zelle’ (3/3)

Dinge, die erst feindlich zu Dir schauen,

Vormorgen (1924) Lieder der Gefangenen.

AS 71.

‘Besucher’ (1/2)

Die Augen sind vom Haßschrei der Gefängnismauern

Gedichte der Gefangenen (1921).

GW II 320.

‘Besucher’ (2/2)

Augen sind vom Schrei der Mauern

Vormorgen (1924) Lieder der Gefangenen.

AS 87, PBDG 284.

‘Brief’ (-/-)

Du Bruder aus Rußland schriebst

Unpublished (N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz).

1. Dated ‘Ernst Toller 1917’.

APP.

D

[‘Dämmerung’] (1/3)

Am frühen Abend lischt das Leuchten deiner Zelle.

Der Freihafen, 2 (1919/20), H. 10, pp. 146-147.

1. In this version the poem is untitled.

APP.

‘Dämmerung’ (2/3)

Am frühen Abend lischt das Leuchten deiner Zelle.

Gedichte der Gefangenen (1921).

1. Dedication: ‘Romain Rolland dankbar’.

GW II 317.

‘Dämmerung’ (3/3)

Am frühen Abend lischt das Leuchten Deiner Zelle,

Vormorgen (1924) Lieder der Gefangenen.

AS 80.

‘Deutschland’ (2/2)

Durch das Gitter meiner Zelle

Vormorgen (1924) Verse vom Friedhof.

1. In Vormorgen dated 1918.

2. See also ‘Durch das Gitter meiner Zelle...’.

AS 62, PBDG 280.

‘Durch das Gitter meiner Zelle...’ (1/2)

Durch das Gitter meiner Zelle

Die Gäste, 1 (1921), H. 1, p. 38.

1. See also ‘Deutschland’.

APP.

‘Durchsuchung und Fesselung’ (1/2)

Den nackten Leib brutalen Blicken preisgegeben,

Gedichte der Gefangenen (1921).

1. Dedication: ‘Dem Andenken des erschöbten Kameraden Dorfmeister, München’.

GW II 309-310.

‘Durchsuchung und Fesselung’ (2/2)
Nackten Leib brutalen Blicken preisgegeben,
Vormorgen (1924) Lieder der Gefangenen.
AS 68, PBDG 281.

E

‘Entlassene Sträflinge’ (1/2)
Sie träumen, Trunkne, durch vertraute Gassen,
Die weißen Blätter, 6 (1919), pp. 262-263;
Der Weg, (1919), H. 5, p. 2.
1. Gedichte der Gefangenen versions remove ‘strahlend’ in line 2.
GW II 321-322.

‘Entlassene Sträflinge’ (2/2)
Sie träumen, Trunkne, durch vertraute Gassen,
Vormorgen (1924) Lieder der Gefangenen.
AS 88.

[‘Der Entwurzelte’] (-/-)
Ich weiss um deine Tränen, Bruder.
Unpublished (Fritz-Claus-Nachlaß).
1. Undated in the original.
2. Untitled in the MS, but this is its likely title.
APP.

F

‘Fabrikschornsteine am Vormorgen’ (1/2)
Sie stemmen ihre schwarze Wucht in Dämmerhelle,
Verkündigung, ed. by Kayser, Rudolf, Munich, 1921, p. 250.
1. Gedichte der Gefangenen version bears the dedication: ‘Dem Andenken des erschöbten Kameraden Lohmar, München’.
GW II 313.

‘Fabrikschornsteine am Vormorgen’ (2/2)
Sie stemmen ihre Wucht in Dämmerhelle,
Vormorgen (1924) Lieder der Gefangenen.
AS 74.

‘Die Feuer-Kantate’ (-/-)
Du soll nicht mit dem Feuer spielen,
Das Wort, (1938), H. 6, pp. 35-36.
APP.

‘Frühling 1915’ (-/-)

Im Frühling zieh ich in den Kampf

Unpublished (N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz).

**1. Dedicated ‘(R.D. in Verehrung)’, presumably to Richard Dehmel.
APP.**

G

‘Gang zum Schützengraben’ (-/-)

Durch Granattrichter, / Schmutzige Pfützen,

Vormorgen (1924) Verse vom Friedhof.

1. In Vormorgen dated 1915.

AS 51, PBDG 278.

‘Gang zur Ruhestellung’ (1/2)

Mann hinter Mann / Torkelt in eigen Laufgraben.

Unpublished (N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz).

APP.

‘Gang zur Ruhestellung’ (2/2)

Mann hinter Mann, / Torkelt im Laufgraben.

Vormorgen (1924) Verse vom Friedhof.

1. In Vormorgen dated 1915.

AS 52.

‘Gefangene Mädchen’ (1/2)

Wie kleine arme Dirnen an belebten Straßenecken

Gedichte der Gefangenen (1921).

GW II 312-313.

‘Gefangene Mädchen’ (2/2)

Wie kleine Dirnen an belebten Straßenecken

Vormorgen (1924) Lieder der Gefangenen.

AS 73.

‘Der Gefangene und der Tod’ (1/3)

Ich denke deinen Namen, Tod, und um bricht

Gedichte der Gefangenen (1921).

1. Dedication: ‘Meinem lieben Zellennachbarn Valtin Hartig’.

GW II 314-315.

‘Gefangene und Tod’ (3/3)

Ich denke Dich, o Tod:

**Das Dreieck, 1 (1924/25), H. 4/5, p. 54: Die Lyrik der Generation, ed. by Lherman,
Jo, Berlin, 1925.**

APP.

‘Ein Gefangener reicht dem Tod die Hand’ (1/2)
Erst hörte man den Schrei der armen Kreatur.
Gedichte der Gefangenen (1921).
GW II 319-320.

‘Gefangener reicht dem Tod die Hand’ (2/2)
Erst spitzer Schrei der armen Kreatur,
Vormorgen (1924) Lieder der Gefangenen.
AS 84.

‘Gefangener und Tod’ (2/3)
Ich denke Dich, o Tod:
Vormorgen (1924) Lieder der Gefangenen.
AS 76.

‘Gemeinsame Haft’ (1/2)
Sie sind gepfercht in einen schmalen Käfiggang,
Gedichte der Gefangenen (1921).
GW II 320-321.

‘Gemeinsame Haft’ (2/2)
Gepfercht in einen schmalen Käfiggang,
Vormorgen (1924) Lieder der Gefangenen.
AS 86.

‘Geschützwache’ (-/-)
Sternenhimmel. / Gebändigtes Untier
Vormorgen (1924) Verse vom Friedhof.
1. In Vormorgen dated 1915.
AS 50, PBDG 278.

H

‘Die Häßliche’ (-/-)
Mir graut vor meinem verknüppelten Körper.
Unpublished (N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz).
APP.

‘Der Heiland geht durch die Vorstadt’ (-/-)
Frauen, die mit welchem Schoß
Unpublished (N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz).
1. Undated in the original.
APP.

I

'Ich habe Euch umarmt mit Flammenhänden...' (1/2)

Ich habe Euch umarmt mit Flammenhänden,

Unser Weg 1920. Jahrbuch Verlag Paul Cassirer, Berlin, 1919, p. 74.

APP.

'Ich habe Euch umarmt' (2/2)

Ich habe Euch umarmt mit Flammenhänden,

Vormorgen (1924) Verse vom Friedhof.

1. In Vormorgen dated 'Militärgefängnis 1918'.

AS 60, PBDG 279-280.

['Ich suche Dich'] (-/-)

Ich suche Dich

Unpublished (N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz).

1. No date, possibly pre-war dating from Toller's student period in Grenoble, cf. references to women 'die Liebe verkaufen'.

2. Eleven copies of this in the Toller-Mappe in Koblenz.

APP.

K

'Konzert' (-/-)

Marmorfeiler gischten zu kristallinen Säulen,

Vormorgen (1924) Lieder der Gefangenen.

1. In Vormorgen dated 'Urlaub 1916'.

AS 54, PBDG 278.

'Den Künftigen' (IV. Tafel) (-/-)

Über Gezeiten grüßen wir Dich, Du Werkvolk der Erde!

Unpublished (Archiv der Akademie der Künste Berlin).

1. The fourth of four poems probably entitled 'Vier Tafeln'.

2. Undated in the original.

3. Line 2, crossed out in the MS, reads:

Sühnende wir der Schuld entweichter Geschlechter.

APP.

L

'Den Lebenden' (III. Tafel) (1/2)

Euch geziemt nicht Trauern und weinend Verweilen,
Unpublished (Archiv der Akademie der Künste Berlin).

1. The third of four poems probably entitled 'Vier Tafeln'.
2. Undated in the original.
3. Line 5, crossed out in the MS, reads:

Eint Euch zur Phalanx verleumdeten Werkvolks,

APP.

'Den Lebenden' (2/2)

Euch ziemt nicht Trauern,
Vormorgen (1924).

1. The second of the Zwei Tafeln between the Verse vom Friedhof and the Lieder der Gefangenen.

AS 64.

'Legende' (-/-)

Alte Sage geht von Frauen,
Unpublished (N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz).

1. Undated in the original.

APP.

'Leichen im Priesterwald' (1/2)

Ein Düngerhaufen faulender Menschenleiber.

Verkündigung, ed. by Kayser, Rudolf, Munich, 1921, p. 251.

APP.

'Leichen im Priesterwald' (2/2)

Ein Düngerhaufen faulender Menschenleiber:

Vormorgen (1924) Lieder der Gefangenen.

1. In Vormorgen dated 1916.

AS 55, PBDG 279.

'Liebe' (-/-)

Ich bin das A und das O,

Unpublished (N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz).

1. Dated in pencil '1909'.

APP.

'Lied der Einsamkeit' (1/3)

Sie wölbt um meine Seele Kathedralen,

Die weißen Blätter, 6 (1919), p. 264.

APP.

‘Lied der Einsamkeit’ (2/3)
Sie wölbt um meine Seele Kathedralen,
Gedichte der Gefangenen (1921).
GW II 312.

‘Lied der Einsamkeit’ (3/3)
Sie wölbt um meine Seele Kathedralen,
Vormorgen (1924) Lieder der Gefangenen.
AS 72, PBDG 282-283.

‘Lied der englischen Arbeiter’ (-/-)
Weh, weh, weh und weh, ob Elend, Sklaverei und Not,
Verbrüderung, Berlin, 1930, p. 30.
1. This is a substantially altered version of a song from Die Maschinenstürmer. [GW II 126-127]
APP.

‘Lumpenlied’ (-/-)
Was fragt Ihr mich, woher ich kam
Unpublished (N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz).
1. Dated in pencil ‘1908’.
APP.

M

‘Marschlied’ (1/2)
Wir Wand’rer zum Tode,
Die Aktion, 8 (1918), p. 172.
APP.

‘Marschlied’ (2/2)
Wir Wandrer zum Tode,
Vormorgen (1924) Lieder der Gefangenen.
1. In Vormorgen dated 1915.
AS 48, PBDG 277.

‘Die Mauer der Erschossenen’ (1/2)
Wie aus dem Leib des heiligen Sebastian,
Gedichte der Gefangenen (1921).
GW II 314.

‘Mauer der Erschossenen’ (2/2)
Vor Schrei und Aufschrei krümmte sich die Wand.
Vormorgen (1924) Lieder der Gefangenen.
AS 75, PBDG 283.

‘Der Meister’ (-/-)

Wie er daherschreitet

Unpublished (N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz).

1. Undated, possibly from his student days in Grenoble, Heidelberg or Munich.
APP.

‘Menschen’ (1/2)

Als der Krieg sie überfiel wie ein toller Hund,

Kameraden der Menschheit, ed. by Rubiner, Ludwig, Potsdam, 1919, pp. 62-63.

APP.

‘Menschen’ (2/2)

Krieg verjäherte zum Gespenst,

Vormorgen (1924) Verse vom Friedhof.

1. In Vormorgen dated 1917.

AS 57.

‘Morgen’ (-/-)

Feldküchen. / Fahrer schlafhockend

Vormorgen (1924) Verse vom Friedhof.

1. In Vormorgen dated 1915.

AS 49.

‘Mütter’ (1/3)

Aus weißen Lilien sei euch ein Tempel erbaut,

Kameraden der Menschheit, ed. by Rubiner, Ludwig, Potsdam, 1919, pp. 64-65.

APP.

‘Mütter’ (2/3)

Aus weißen Lilien sei euch ein Tempel erbaut,

Nie wieder Krieg!, Berlin, 1924, p. 36.

APP.

‘Den Müttern’ (3/3)

Mütter, / Eure Hoffnung, Eure frohe Bürde

Vormorgen (1924) Verse vom Friedhof.

1. In Vormorgen dated 1917.

AS 59.

N

‘Nacht’ (-/-)

Zinnoberroter Traum emporreißt unterdrückte Lust

Vormorgen (1924) Lieder der Gefangenen.

AS 85.

‘Nacht im Priesterwald’ (-/-)

Der Vollmond fließt azurne Ströme

**Unpublished: MS in the Fritz-Claus-Nachlaß is dated ‘München 21.4.1917’.
APP.**

‘Nächte’ (1/3)

Die Nächte bergen stilles Weinen.

Der Freihafen, 2 (1919/20), H. 10, p. 147.

APP.

‘Nächte’ (2/3)

Die Nächte bergen stilles Weinen,

Gedichte der Gefangenen (1921).

GW II 318.

‘Nächte’ (3/3)

Die Nächte bergen stilles Weinen,

Vormorgen (1924) Lieder der Gefangenen.

AS 81.

‘November’ (1/2)

Wie tote ausgebrannte Augen sind die schwarzen Fensterhöhlen.

Gedichte der Gefangenen (1921).

GW II 319.

‘November’ (2/2)

Städte sind sehr fern, darin die Menschen leben.

Vormorgen (1924) Lieder der Gefangenen.

AS 83.

P

‘Pfade zur Welt’ (-/-)

Wir leben fremd den lauten Dingen,

Gedichte der Gefangenen (1921).

1. Vormorgen substitutes ‘Nachtwind’ for ‘Wind’ in line 13.

GW II 316, AS 77.

R

‘Resignation’ (-/-)

Da sich dein Leib erschloß wie junger Frühlingmorgen,

Unpublished (N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz).

1. Undated, almost certainly pre-war, possibly from Toller’s schooldays in Bromberg.

APP.

'Der Ringende' (1/3)

Die Dichter weihen bunten Versenkranz

Unpublished: Fritz-Claus-Nachlaß.

APP.

'Der Ringende' (2/3)

Die Dichter weihen bunten Versenkranz

Die weißen Blätter, 6 (1919), pp. 261-262.

1. This published version merely omits the last line of (1/3).

'Der Ringende' (3/3)

Mutter, Mutter, / Warum bist Du nicht?

Vormorgen (1924) Verse vom Friedhof.

1. In Vormorgen dated 1912.

AS 47, PBDG 277.

S

'Sämann -- Soldat' (-/-)

Fremde Scholle durchpflügst Du mit starker Faust

Unpublished (N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz).

1. On the same sheet as ['Steht eine Wacht in Frankreich'] in original.

APP.

'Schlaflose Nacht' (1/2)

Metallne Schritte in die Nächte fallen,

Der Freihafen, 4 (1921), p. 37;

Gedichte der Gefangenen (1921).

GW II 309.

'Schlaflose Nacht' (2/2)

Metallne Schritte in die Nächte fallen,

Vormorgen (1924) Lieder der Gefangenen.

AS 67, PBDG 281.

'Das Schwalbenbuch' (-/-)

Ein Freund starb in der Nacht.

Published by Gustav Kiepenheuer Verlag, Potsdam, 1924.

1. Parts of this poem were published separately in many different journals.

2. For an account of the various impressions and editions, see Chapter 4.

GW II 323-350, AS 221-270, PBDG 285-307.

'Schwangeres Mädchen auf dem Gefängnishof' (1/2)

Du schreitest wunderbar im Glast der mittäglichen Stunde,

Gedichte der Gefangenen (1921).

GW II 316-317.

‘Schwangeres Mädchen I & II’ (2/2)
Du schreitest wunderbar in mittäglicher Stunde,
Vormorgen (1924) Lieder der Gefangenen.
AS 78-79, PBDG 283.

‘Soldaten’ (-/-)
Ich kann die Gesichter meiner Kameraden nicht vergessen.
Kameraden der Menschheit, ed. by Rubiner, Ludwig, Potsdam, 1919, pp. 63-64;
Die Bücherkiste, 1 (1919/20), H. 5/6/7, p. 70.
1. The version in Die Bücherkiste has the first line ‘Ich kann die Gesichter meiner Kameraden nicht mehr vergessen’, but is otherwise identical to that in Kameraden der Menschheit.
APP.

‘Spaziergang der Sträflinge’ (1/3)
Sie schleppen ihre Zellen mit in stumpfen Augen
Die weißen Blätter, 6 (1919), p. 262.
APP.

‘Spaziergang der Sträflinge’ (2/3)
Sie schleppen ihre Zellen mit in stumpfen Blicken
Gedichte der Gefangenen (1921).
1. Dedication: ‘Dem Andenken des erschossenen Kameraden Wohlmuth, München’.
GW II 311.

‘Spaziergang der Sträflinge’ (3/3)
Sie schleppen Zellen mit in stumpfen Blicken
Vormorgen (1924) Lieder der Gefangenen.
AS 70, PBDG 282.

‘Ständchen’ (-/-)
Weiß nicht Mädels, sinds die grauen
Unpublished (N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz).
1. Undated, probably from Toller’s schooldays in Bromberg.
APP.

[‘Steht eine Wacht in Frankreich’] (-/-)
Steht eine Wacht in Frankreich.
Unpublished (N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz).
1. Undated, on same sheet as ‘Sämann -- Soldat’ in the original.
APP.

‘Stellungskrieg’ (-/-)
Alltag hämmert, / Würgt Dich,
Vormorgen (1924) Verse vom Friedhof.
1. In Vormorgen dated 1916.
AS 53.

‘Stimmungsbild’ (2/2)

Auf einer Stange morsch und faul

Kunstblatt, 8 (1924), p. 332.

1. See ‘Alp’.

AS 56, PBDG 279.

‘Studentinnen’ (-/-)

Die Frauen gehen mit Wünschen schwanger.

Unpublished (N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz).

APP.

‘Sylvester 1916’ (-/-)

Eine Fratze grinst mich grünlich an.

Unpublished (N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz).

APP.

T

‘Den Toten’ (I. Tafel) (1/2)

Die trotzig Leiber gestemmt

Unpublished (Archiv der Akademie der Künste Berlin).

1. The first of four poems probably entitled ‘Vier Tafeln’.

2. Undated in the original.

3. Original first three lines crossed through in the MS read:

Steil gemergelte Leiber gestemmt

Wider den Gierschild blinder Bedränger,

Selig Erfüllte vom Glauben an bessere Menschheit

4. Second version of line 1 had ‘gemergelten’ instead of ‘trotzig’ before this was crossed through and replaced.

APP.

‘Den Toten der Revolution’ (2/2)

Todgeweihte Leiber trotzig gestemmt

Vormorgen (1924).

1. The first of the Zwei Tafeln between the Verse vom Friedhof and the Lieder der Gefangenen.

AS 63.

U

‘Über meiner Zelle...’ (1/2)

Über meiner Zelle / Stapfen schwere

Unser Weg 1920. Jahrbuch Verlag Paul Cassirer, Berlin, 1919, p. 75.

APP.

‘Über meiner Zelle...’ (2/2)

Über meiner Zelle / Stapfen schwere
Vormorgen (1924) Verse vom Friedhof.
1. In Vormorgen dated 1918.
AS 61, PBDG 280.

‘Umarmung’ (-/-)

Du kamst zu mir in farbigen Gewändern
Unpublished (Fritz-Claus-Nachlaß).
APP.

‘Unser Weg’ (-/-)

Die Klöster sind verdorrt und haben ihren Sinn verloren,
Der Tag des Proletariats, Berlin, 1920.
1. Der Tag des Proletariats gives the publication date as ‘November 1920’.
2. Dedication: ‘Dem Andenken Kurt Eisners’.
3. Appeared in identical versions in the Gedichte der Gefangenen and in Vormorgen.
GW II 322, AS 89.

V

‘Verweilen um Mitternacht’ (1/2)

Um Mitternacht erwachst du. Glocken fallen
Der Freihafen, 2 (1919/20), p. 148.
1. In Die Volksbühne, 1 (1919/20), H. 1, p. 3 in line 1 read ‘hallen’ for ‘fallen’.
2. The Gedichte der Gefangenen versions omit ‘dunklen’ in line 8.
GW II 317-318.

‘Verweilen um Mitternacht’ (2/2)

Um Mitternacht erwachst du. Glocken fallen
Vormorgen (1924) Lieder der Gefangenen.
1. In Das Dreieck, 1 (1924/25), H. 4/5, p. 54 the poem is the same as (1/2) except
for the omission of the last two lines.
AS 82.

W

‘Wälder’ (1/2)

Ihr Wälder fern an Horizonten schwingend,
Gedichte der Gefangenen (1921).
GW II 310.

‘Wälder’ (2/2)

Ihr Wälder fern an Horizonten schwingend,
Vormorgen (1924) Lieder der Gefangenen.
AS 69, PBDG 281-282.

[‘Wenn ich weiße schmale Hände sehe’] (-/-)
Wenn ich weiße schmale Hände sehe,
Unpublished (N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz).
APP.

‘Widmung’ (1/3)
Dämmerung, gütige Schwester der Gefangenen, wie ist
Gedichte der Gefangenen (1923).
1. See ‘An alle Gefangenen’.
GW II 356-357.

‘Widmung’ (2/3)
Dämmerung, gütige Schwester der Gefangenen, wie ist
Kunst und Volk, Vienna, 1923, p. 66.
1. See ‘An alle Gefangenen’.
APP.

‘Wunder’ (-/-)
Meine ruhelosen Hände
Unpublished (Fritz-Claus-Nachlaß).
APP.

Appendix 2

Unpublished poems and those not readily accessible

Reproduced below are those of Toller's poems which do not appear in the Ausgewählte Schriften, the Gesammelte Werke or in journals which are easily accessible to the reader of this thesis. Some of the poems come from manuscripts held in the Deutsches Literaturarchiv at Marbach am Neckar, the Akademie der Künste in West Berlin or the N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv at Koblenz; others come from journals which are now out of print and which are seldom to be found in libraries. These poems are listed alphabetically. No stanza is separated over two pages.

An invaluable starting point in the research for this thesis was Spalek's bibliography Ernst Toller and his critics (1968), a prodigious feat of academic detective work which succeeded in bringing to the attention of Germanists the most important works of a much-neglected literary and political figure. However since the publication of this work many texts written by Toller have come to light, the most important for this thesis being the manuscript poems in the Deutsches Literaturarchiv in Marbach am Neckar and the Archiv der Akademie der Künste in Berlin, as well as the unpublished poetry in the N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv in Koblenz. This appendix is intended as a complement to Spalek's invaluable work.

A

Abend am Bodensee

In roten Wellenbändern fließen Sonnenstrahlen
Zum perlmuttartigen Horizont, dem letztgeschauten Wall.
Im Norden spielt das Wasser, glänzend wie Metall,
Mit blassen Mondesfingern, die uns Silberteiche malen.

Oft huschen über weite Flächen violette Garben.
Gebirg ruht still, umtönt von weichem Hauch.
Wie schwarze Leichentücher wälzt sich aus Fabriken Rauch -
Ich denke all der Brüder, die zur Abendstunde sterben.

Im Herbst zu sterben ist so schwer, die Bäume glänzen
In brokatner Pracht und lassen glühend tiefe ahnen.
Die Buchenkronen winden sich zu Symphonien von Glutenkränzen,

September-Farbenrausch will uns zu heißem Leben mahnen. -
Ach möchte milde Hand den Brüdern, die im Tode steil sich bäumen,
Erfüllte Ruhe spenden, abendlich verklärtes Träumen.

Source: Die Bücherkiste, 1 (1919/20), H. 5/6/7, p. 66.

Abend am Welssee

Den Eichenwald umgittern lächelnd Birken
In schwärzlich blauem Wasser schattet Astgerank
(Wie Japans Frauen seidne Blumen wirken)
Umrahmt von purpurroter Wolkenbank.

Der Abendwind streift mild um reife Ähren
In sanfter Wellen Spiel verhaucht sein Kuß.
Aus blauen Glocken tönet schmerzliches Gewähren
Vom Walde hallt verrollend ferner Schuß.

Im Teich quarrt hohl der Frösche Zanken.
Die Grillen rührig spitzen Ton.
Am Ufer steht ein Knabe, schlank und nackt.

Und da er steilen Sprungs die Wellen packt
Quirlt Jubelschrei wie glühend roter Mohn.
Aufstrudeln Fluten, die das Wunder tranken.

Source: N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz.

Am Fluß

Schneller wirbeln grüne Kreise,
Graue Flut spitzt weißen Gischt,
Möven tummeln sich zur Reise
Stiebend Sägwerk keifend zischt.

Mittagswind bläht weite Röcke
Morscher Kahn stirbt blind im Sand.
Netze fächeln matt um Pflöcke
Totes stößt der Strom zum Strand.

Der Kanal zerrinnt ins Weite
Nebel schwimmt kulissenhaft
Brücken rollen protzend Kraft.

Fluten stemmen sich an Klippen:
Glucksen Schaum aus Plätscherlippen.
Eine Welle sehnt Geleit.

Source: N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz.

An die Dichter (3/3)

Anklag ich Euch, Ihr Blutschuldträger,
Ihr Dichter, gleißnerische Verse spielend
Berechnend Wirbelwirkung, Aufruhr, Kampfgetümmel
Berechnend sorgsam, lächelnd und erhaben
Oder wissend nickt mit Greisenköpfen
Ihr Dichter, im Papierkorb feig versteckt!
Verbuhlt im Worte, Worte, Worte!
Anklag ich härter Euch, Ihr Blutschuldträger
Ihr Dichter, klugbeflissen Schwelende.
Auf die Tribüne, Angeklagte!
Entsüht Euch!
Sprecht Euch Urteil!
Menschkürder Ihr
Und seid ...?
So sprecht doch! Sprecht Euch Urteil!

Source: Kunstblatt, 8 (1924), p. 332.

An die Sprache

Sprache,
Gefäß göttlichen Geistes.
Weltorgel!
Brausende in allen Registern!
Hauch der Erfüllten,
Stammeln wunder Mütter,
Seziermesser furchtloser Denker,
Dichtergeliebte!

Sie haben Dich geschändet,
In allen Pfützen Europas
Taten Sie Dir Gewalt.
Sie schändeten Dich!
Zeig Dein Gorgonenantlitz den Tempelräubern!
Weh, daß Du Mordschweiß perlst!
Tauch in geheiligten Quell geäderte Glieder
Voll göttlichen Bluts!
Steige verjüngt,
Geheiligt empor!

Source: Die Aktion, 8 (1918), p. 297.

Dem Andenken Kurt Eisners (II. Tafel)

Wehschrei der Sklaven Europas zerschrillte die Erde,
Finsternisse klagten im Herzen der Mütter:
Lügenfratzen der Rassen der Räuber höhnten,
Geschändet, vergessen die Botschaft der großen Propheten:
Proletarier zückte den Mordstahl wider den Bruder -
Einer hielt im verkrampften Faust die rote weisende Fahne,
Einer weckte ins Joch Gebeugte: Revolution!

Source: Archiv der Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

Anklag ich Euch (1/3)

Anklag ich Euch, Ihr Blutschuldträger,
Ihr Dichter, spielend hinter gleißnerischen Versen,
Verbuhlt in Worte, klang- und melodiengedrechselt -
Anklag ich härter Euch, Ihr Blutschuldträger,
Ihr Dichter, klugbeflissen Schwelende.
Berechnet Wirbelwirkung, Aufruhr, Kampfgetümmel,
Berechnet sorgsam, lächelnd und erhaben
Oder wissend nickt mit Greisenköpfen
Und steht daneben.
Schreibt und steht daneben.
Das Volk ist Material,
Gefügig Material für Euch -
Wie für den Herrn, den Ihr bekämpft.
Ihr ruft: ... "Auch Menschen"
Nein ist *Material* für Euch.
Nur wißt Ihr um die feurig quirlenden Kräfte,
Die Ihr entfesselt, Euch zum eitlen Spiel.

Anklag ich Euch, Ihr Blutschuldträger,
Ihr Dichter, im Papierkorb feig versteckt,
Auf die Tribüne, Dichter, Angeklagte!
Entsühnt Euch!
Sprecht Euch Urteil!
Menschkünder Ihr!
Und seid?
So sprecht doch! Sprecht Euch Urteil!

Source: Das Tribunal, 1 (1919), p. 113.

Aus den Erläuterungen des Bundesrats zum Gesetz über den Vaterländischen Hilfsdienst

‘Im Vaterländischen Dienst, welcher Art er auch sei, gibt es nicht Klassen und Schichten, sondern nur Staatsbürger’

Gedenkt des Worts.

Schreibt es an Mauern, Türen, Wände.

Schreibt's an Altäre, steingeformt.

Setzt erzne Tafeln, es zu künden.

In Parlamenten, sei es heiliges Gold.

Grabts in die Herzen, laßt es zünden,

und flammen nie erlöschend drin,

der Ohnmachtszorn, er sei zerschunden,

gebt euer Letztes freudig hin.

Sprengt, was uns zweifelnd einst gebunden.

Gedenkt des Worts: Tut eure Pflicht!

Doch, wenn des Friedens Lichter tagen,

der Alltag euch in Unrecht zwingt,

dann fort mit allem Stank und Klagen,

fort mit dem Knecht, der Karren müde zog.

Gedenkt des Worts!

Und fordert ein den Schwur.

Und handelt, wenn man Euch betrog!

Source: N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz.

Auswendig lernen

Wir Männer, die wir nach fünf Jahren,
in denen wir - wir die Betrogenen waren,
heut zitternd vor Zorn den Haßschrieb gelesen,
der doch ihrer Blutschuld Beweis gewesen -

Wir Weiber, die wir, was wir geboren,
den Heimatlügnern vertrauend, in Schlachten verloren,
unsre Männer, unsre lieben Knaben
gemordet in der Erde liegen haben -

Wir Kinder, die wir vor Haßpoetenrichtern
stehen mit hungeralten Gesichtern,
vor Kerls, die unsre Händchen in Frondienst wollen zwingen,
den sie, zwei Mark die Zeile, in Stinnesblättern heilig singen -

Wir alle, wir alle, wir alle schwören
einen heiligen Schwur, und das Volk soll ihn hören,
wie's Freiheitslied ins Herz wir schmieden:
Wir wollen Frieden! Wir wollen Frieden!

Damit wir einst in helleren Tagen
die Otto und Börries zum Teufel jagen,
die sich wie Zecken in unsre Leiber krallten,
und die heute ihr schamloses Maul - nicht halten!

Source: Die Weltbühne, 17 II (1921), p. 205.

B

Begegnung in der Zelle (1/3)

Die Dinge, die wie Feinde zu dir schauen,
als wären sie in Späherdienst gezwängte Schergen,
sie laden dich zu Fahrten ein gleich guten Fergen
und hegen dich wie schwesterliche Frauen.

Es nähern sich dir all die kargen Dinge.
Die schmale Pritsche kommt, die blauen Wasserkrüge,
der Schemel flüstert, daß er gerne dich ertrüge,
die Wintermücken wiegen sich wie kleine Schmetterlinge.

Und auch das Gitterfenster kommt, das du verloren
mit Augen, die sich an den schwarzen Stäben stachen,
anstarrtest, während deine Arme hilflos brachen.

Und Totenköpfe der Erschossenen wachsen aus versperrten Toren.
Das Gitterfenster ruft: Nun, Lieber, schaue,
wie ich aus Wolken dir ein Paradies erbaue.

Source: Der Freihafen, 4 (1921), p. 37.

Brief

Du Bruder aus Rußland schriebst
"Wir alle sind Kinder der Mühe,
wir alle sind Kinder der Not
Dem Elend des Lebens glaubten wir
Durch Kindermorden zu entfliehen.
Die Schmach vergessen: sei unser heißer Wunsch.
Und uns umarmen brüderlich: sei unser heißer Wille".

Dank Bruder drüben.
Doch du vergassest:
Wir Alle sind Kinder göttlichen Geistes
Wir Alle sind Kinder der Fülle,
Unendlich reich.

Mann konnte unsere Körper schänden
Doch unsere Seele können
Waffen nicht noch Gas vernichten.
Da sind wir Schützer.
Oder Feind. Wie wir's bestimmen.

Um unser Mensch-Sein geht es, Bruder
Das ist viel.

Source: N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz.

D

[Dämmerung] (1/3)

Am frühen Abend lischt das Leuchten deiner Zelle.
Von grauen Wänden gleiten schlanke Schatten.
Wer trotzig schrie, wird träumerisch ermatten.
Die braune Stille schwingt wie eine milde Welle.

Und oft erfüllt den engen Raum verzückte Helle.
Gestalten deines Herzens locken dich zu heitrem Reigen.
Da wird ein Tanz im schweren Mantel Schweigen.
Da wird ein bunter Klang im dämmernden Gefälle.

Dein Atmen ist ein Ruf, ein einz'ger Ruf.
Die Wächter schlürfen durch die Gänge, schele Gäste,
Du bist so reich und lüdst sie ein zum Feste,

das dir Genosse Abend schuf.
Doch grämlich drücken sie an Guckloch trockne Schläfe.
Es ist kein Ruf, der ihre Herzen träfe.

Source: 'Drei Sonette. Von Ernst Toller', Der Freihafen, 2 (1919/20), H. 10, pp. 146-147.

Durch das Gitter meiner Zelle... (1/2)

Durch das Gitter meiner Zelle
Seh ich Kinder spielen:
Murmel, Haschen und Verstecken,
Lachen, tollen Buben, Mädchen.

Seh ich Kinder spielen ...

Eingespant in enge Zelle,
Kerkerjahre ...
Marterjahre ...

Deutschland,
Deine Söhne, die Dich lieben,
Dürfen viele Jahre
Nicht mit Kindern spielen.

Source: Die Gäste, 1 (1921), H. 1, p. 38.

E

[Der Entwurzelte]

1.

Ich weiss um Deine Tränen, Bruder.
Du streckst gedankenmüde Hände
Nach warmer Form voll süssem Duft,
Die Dir ein frohes Lächeln gab.
Du nanntest sie (und Deine Augen ruhten tief,
Als schautest Du in weite Ebne)
Ersehnte Heimat.
Da zischen schöngestaltet Menschen' zähen Schleim
Und jagen geifernd Dich von dannen.

2.

Sei ruhig, Bruder, trockne Deine Tränen.
Sei Erdreich!
Baum!
Der in Dir wissend Wurzel schlägt.
Wohl tönst Du nicht in Farbenharmonien,
Zerzauste Kiefer, rissig trottest Du dem Sturm.
Und trottest jenen, die da wähten,
Sie könnten Deine Wurzel, die wie zarte Fühler
Sich zuckend lösen, dorren machen.

Source: Fritz-Claus-Nachlaß, Marbach am Neckar.

F

Die Feuer-Kantate

I

EIN ALTES SPRICHWORT

Du soll nicht mit dem Feuer spielen,
sagt ein altes Sprichwort.
Wer mit dem Feuer spielt,
verbrennt sich die Hände.
Doch spielen viele Menschen
gerne mit dem Feuer.
Auch verbrennen Mörder
zuweilen ihre Opfer,
um die Spuren
des Mordes zu verwischen.

II

DAS HAKENKREUZ

Die Sonne brennt
seit Millionen Jahren;
ihr Feuer erwärmt
die frierende Erde,
das Getier in den Wäldern,
die Fische im Wasser
und die sanften Blumen.
Die Menschen lobten das
himmlische Feuer
und schufen sich
ein irdisches Bild
der kreisenden Sonne:
das Hakenkreuz.
Als über Deutschland
das Hakenkreuz zu leuchten
begann,
war es ein trübes Leuchten,
und es war ein Geruch
von versengtem
Menschenfleisch.

III

DIE BÖSEN KOMMUNISTEN

Warum brennt unsere Sonne,
warum leuchtet sie nicht?
sagten die Männer,
die das Hakenkreuz
am Armband trugen.
Daran sind die bösen
Kommunisten schuld,
sie spielen nicht mit dem Feuer -
da liegt der Hund begraben.

IV

BERATUNG

Es war ein Streiten und Raufen,
welches Haus am
rötesten brennen würde
in der mondlosen Winternacht.
Und sie beschlossen,
den Reichstag anzuzünden.
Dort schlief die deutsche Freiheit
einen schweren traumlosen Schlaf.

V

FEURIO

Der Reichstag brennt!
schrien die Extrablätter,
Der Reichstag brennt!
funkten die Morseapparate.
Der Reichstag brennt!
gröhlte das Radio.
Die bösen Kommunisten
haben mit dem Feuer gespielt,
das sollen sie büßen!
In dieser Nacht
verhafteten die Führer,
die das Hakenkreuz
am Armband trugen,
Männer und Frauen
zu tausenden,
und sie wachten darüber,
daß die Feuerwehr
den Brand nicht lösche.

VI

DIE SONNE BRINGT ES AN DEN TAG

Als am nächsten Tag
die Sonne den Himmel rötete,
sah man verkohlte Balken
und einen Haufen Asche -
aber auch die Spuren
der Brandstifter.
Und die Menschen deuteten
mit Fingern auf ihre
versengten Hände,
und es ging ein Flüstern
und Raunen
durch die Welt:
Hakenkreuz verbrennt
den Reichstag!

VII

DAS WUNDER

Wunder geschehen nicht
Auf dieser Erde:
hast du ein Feuer erstickt,
und war es noch so
gewaltig,
kannst du es nicht mehr
entfachen
mit dem Atem
deines Mundes
oder
einem Blasebalg;
der Weise bedenkt,
bevor er
handelt.
Aber diesmal geschah
ein Wunder:
der Reichstag
brannte in einer Nacht -
doch er brennt,
brennt fort
in allen Nächten,
und er leuchtet
künftigen Geschlechtern!
Denn du sollst nicht
mit dem Feuer spielen.

Source: Das Wort, (1938), H. 6, pp. 35-36.

Frühling 1915

(R.D. in Verehrung)

Im Frühling zieh ich in den Kampf
Zum Siegen oder Sterben.
Was schert mich eigener Sorgen Krampf
Heut schlag ich ihn lachend in Scherben.

Im brausenden Sturm, mit lockigem Haar
reckt jauchzend ein Bub sich auf Erden:
Wacht auf, wacht auf, tot ist was war,
wacht auf zu neuem Werden.

Ihr Brüder wißt im Sturmwind kam
der junge Frühling fahren,
Werft hurtig vor Euch müden Gram
und zieht ihm nach in Scharen.

Noch nie habe ich es so gefühlt
wie ich dich Deutschland liebe,
Da Frühlingszauber Dich umspielt
inmitten Kampfgetriebe.

Im Frühling zieh ich in den Kampf
Zum Siegen oder Sterben.
Was schert mich eigener Sorgen Krampf
Heut schlag ich ihn lachend in Scherben.

Source: N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz.

Gang zur Ruhestellung (1/2)

Mann hinter Mann
 Torkelt in eigen Laufgraben.
 Schweres Gepäck drückt morsche Knochen.
 An Kleidern frisst Lehm.
 In grauen Gesichtern stumpfen müde Augen.
 Irgendwer stolpert. Fällt hin.
 Beissendes Brummen.
 Am Waldfriedhof Sammeln.
 Einer träumt am letzten Grab:
 'Solchen Haufen Weihnachtskuchen
 wünscht ich mir als Kind,
 soviel.'
 Vierzehn zerbrach eine Mine.
 Gläserne Seelen sind blutrote Scherben.
 Körper sind Fleischfetzen und kotiger Schmutz.
 Wann war's doch?
 Gestern.
 Ihr schaudert.

Source: N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz.

Gefangene und Tod (3/3)

Gefangener spricht:

Ich denke Dich, o Tod:
 Um mich bricht der Zellenbau in Trümmer:
 In meiner Seele gellt ein Schrei,
 O, daß ich fliehen könnte!

Tod spricht:

Da Du das Leben willst, warum Erbleichen,
 Wenn meine Melodie in Deiner Seele tönt?
 Wer mich erträgt, der atmet wie versöhnt,
 Der wird den Sternen seine Hände reichen.

Ist tot der Baum im Herbst der Abendweiten?
 Ist tot die Blume, deren Blüte fallend sich erfüllt?
 Ist tot der schwarze Stein, der Flammenkräfte hüllt?
 Ist tot die Erde über Gräbern menschlicher Gezeiten?

O, sie belogen Dich! Auch ich bin Leben,
So sprachen sie: der Tod sei aus der Welt.
Ich bin das Ewige der Formen, die Vollendung weben,
Dem Einen nahe, das den Sinn in Händen hält.

Source: Das Dreieck, H. 4/5, p. 54: Die Lyrik einer Generation. Eine Anthologie unveröffentlichter Gedichte sechzig deutscher Autoren, ed. by Jo Lherman, Berlin, 1925.

H

Die Häßliche

1.

Mir graut vor meinem verknüppelten Körper.
Ich ziehe häßliche Kleider an.
Wenn ich nach einem schönen Gewand greife,
Muß ich schrill auflachen,
Wie ein Humorist in einem Variete,
Der dumme Couplets singt
Vor blöden Gesichtern, [sic]
Und der sich erinnert, daß er einstmals mit seinem Blute
Flammende Verse geschrieben.
Darum ziehe ich häßliche Kleider an.

2.

Ich bin meiner Seele müde.
Einst ließ sie glauben
Daß sie strahlte ein geschliffener Diamant,
Daß sie die körperliche Form in tausend Strahlen bräche,
Um meine flache Brust Gloriolen winde ---
Doch wenn ich mich in den Augen des Mannes sah,
Den ich liebte,
Dann schaute ich meine Seele an
Wie eine fahle trübe Dämmerstunde

3.

Ich will kein Kind gebären.
Einst ging ich mit wiegenden Schritten
Die Straße entlang
Und mühte mich, es einer Dirne gleich zu tun.
Aber niemand kam zu mir.
Käme heute jemand, ich wiese ihm die Tür.
Ich bin zu wund, um ein Kind zu gebären.
Ich würde meinem Kinde Müdigkeit ins Blut schütten,
Aus meinen Gliedern zuckte Enttäuschung.
Dann würde es kränkeln und ohne Kraft sein
Und würde mich hassen.

4.

Warum gehe ich nicht davon?
Ich bin nicht schwach.
Nur müde.
Und so werde ich noch viele Jahre
In meinem Zimmer sitzen
Mit den roten Plüschmöbeln
Und die Vase anstarren,
Die meinem Auge weh tun,
Und die Oeldrucke.
Denn ich scheue mich, sie fort zu tun.
Sie alle gleichen mir

Source: N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz.

Der Heiland geht durch die Vorstadt

Frauen, die mit welchem Schoß
Welche Kinder in die Höfe schicken.
Männer, die nach dumpfem Los
Schweren Schrittes wandern in die Fabriken.
Häuser die Fabriken eins dem anderen gleichen,
Mit gedrückten Stirnen müde sich gen Himmel schleichen.
Schluchzend streichelt er ein schmutziges Kind mit schmutzigen Haaren,
Sammelt um sich all die kleinen kümmerlichen Scharen.
Voll Erwartung schauen sie ihn fragend an,
Seltsam dünkt sie dieser fremde Mann.
Als er ihre Augen leer und hungrig sieht,
Möcht er ihnen Märchen singen oder auch ein frohes Lied.
Doch da beugt eines der Kleinen nieder in den Kot
Und es ruft mit Fistelstimme: "oh da liegt ein Stückchen Brot!"
Und die anderen stürzen gierig darauf los,
Dünne Ärmchen raufen sich; ach der Hunger ist so groß.
Als ers sieht, da möchte er weinen, aber sein Gesicht wird hart,
Alles Licht beginnt zu schwelen, alles Mitleid grau erstarrt.
Kann nicht Vater! rufen und ergeben sich in ihn versenken.
Hohn scheint ihm die Lehre: einst wird ers zum Guten lenken.
Seine Fäuste ballen sich in tiefsten, niegewußten Nöten,
Trotzig bäumt er seine Seele: w o i s t G o t t ? I c h w i l l i h n t ö t e n

Seine Worte glühen Blutgefackln in der Luft.
Und ihm ist, als sei er auferstanden aus verwester Gruft.

Source: N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz.

Ich habe Euch umarmt mit Flammenhänden... (1/2)

Ich habe Euch umarmt mit Flammenhänden,
 All meine Liebe goß sich, Lavaströme,
 Um Eure Leiber, die sich aufgesteilt zum Lichte bogen.
 O, meine Worte wurden blutdurchpulste Speere,
 Die Euch von träger Starre, Leben lügnerisch geheißten,
 Zu hellem Lichte, brausendem erlösten.
 Euch, Müttern, schleuderte ich meine Verse
 Zu unbefleckter, heiliger Empfängnis,
 Lichtmale eingebrannt in wunden Schoß.
 Ihr Tausende, fabrikgemartert, Arbeitssielentiere,
 Ihr wurdet einzig strahlend Menschaugen.
 Von langer Blindheit jäh erlöst,
 Ihr wurdet einzige befreitgestraffte Hand,
 Die ich ergriff in brünstiger Umklammerung -
 O dieser heilige Weihedruck von Menschenhand!
 Sprach ich zu Euch?
 Der Mensch, gewichtlos, Licht, beschwingt,
 Amerika und Asien, Afrika, Europa fest umspannend,
 Der sich am Morgen in Platanenwäldern träumend regt.
 In Deutschland einsam nächtens Wünsche schreit,
 Auf Polens weiten Wäldern Sehnsucht stöhnt,
 Der sich in Fluten stürzt, Atlantic zu durchschwimmen.
 Der farbiger Ellipsen Tanz um Sonnenbälle fliegt -
 Der Mensch!
 Der Mensch!
 Er forderte den Menschen!
 Er sprach zu Euch.

Source: Unser Weg 1920. Jahrbuch Verlag Paul Cassirer, Berlin, 1919, p. 74.

[Ich suche Dich]

Ich suche Dich
Verflogen der Rausch von Sinneslust
Zerflattert die Liebe, die unbewußt
in meinem Herzen sich barg.
Ich suchte Dich unter frühlingsjungen Weibern
mit sehrenden Blicken und schämigen Leibern
und fand dich nicht.
Ich ging zu liebessatten reifen Frauen.
Ich hoffte ihr Inneres zu schauen.
Und sah eine Krüste von Lüge und Schein
und spielerisches Müdesein.
Da schlich ich zu ihnen, die Liebe verkaufen
ich gab ihnen Gold
und sie kamen gelaufen
und ich fand der Seele Sarg.
Ich suche Dich
ich will Dich finden
und müßt ich mit Ketten dich binden.
Ich will Dich erkämpfen mit meinem Leben,
ich will Dich ertrotzen und mich Dir geben,
ich will mich in Demut vor Dir neigen
und alle Wünsche sollen schweigen,
Wo bist Du,
daß ich Dich schmücke königlich?
Ich such Dich.

Source: N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz.

K

Den Künftigen (IV. Tafel)

Über Gezeiten grüßen wir Dich, Du Werkvolk der Erde!
Süß ist Dein Kelch vom Frieden der Menschen!
Reif Deine Fristen! O Psalmen der Freude! -
Träumend umfängt unsere Seele Deine Gestalt ...
Volk der Verheißung, gesegnet seist Du!

Source: Archiv der Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

Den Lebenden (III. Tafel) (1/2)

Euch geziemt nicht Trauern und weinend Verweilen,
 Euch ward Vermächtnis, getränkt vom Herzblut der Brüder,
 Euch wartet die schaffende, heilige Tat.
 Lastend bedrängt den Nacken das Kummer der Zeiten ...
 Aufsprengt dem helleren Morgen die Tore!

Source: Archiv der Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

Legende

Alte Sage geht von Frauen,
 Die Kinder anderer Frauen töten.
 Sie sind verdammt!
 Zu leben ohne Frucht verdammt.

Aus allen Fabriken der Welt,
 In den Kugeln geschmiedet,
 Eisenhöhlen mit giftigen Gasen gefüllt,
 Bomben mit augenätzenden Säuren
 Totgeschosse gedreht -----
 Treten in wallenden Reihen
 Bleiche Frauen.
 Hände gleiten von fallenden Brüsten,
 Decken kraftlos verwelkten Leib.
 Lallen ein Lied
 Wandern auf Landstraßen,
 Knien nicht, fluchen nicht,
 Wandern und
 Lallen ein Lied.
 Das lautet:
 Ein Kind ein Kind.

Der Teufel verwünschte ihr Lallen
 Das ihm Ohren ätzte,
 Sich gelb um seine Augen legte wie giftiges Gas.
 Bat den Gekreuzigten,
 Mittler zu sein,
 An Gottes Thron.
 Gott möge die Frauen verdammen
 Zu ewigem Schweigen und Feuerqual. -- [sic]

Den Heiland fror.
Er dachte der Hungerkrallen, die viele Frauen gezwungen,
Er dachte des Kriegsgebots.
Aber dann schüttelte er sein Haupt
Und verhüllte es mit weißen Tüchern.

Jahre durch lallte der Frauen Lied.
Da schrie der Teufel gräßlichen Fluch
Und schlich sich zum Vater.
Gottes Fäuste krämpften sich
Daß in sein Fleisch die Nägel drangen
Und rote Bluttröpfen fielen.
Mohnfelder wuchsen da.
Wer auf ihnen schlief, starb.
Dann stöhnte Er auf,
Daß die himmlischen [sic] Bäume
Zu zittern begannen
Und ihre Blätter drei Tage
Vertrocknet zu Boden hingen.
Geängstigt wollten die Engel ein Lied einstimmen
Da kreischten sie.

Als sie es merkten,
Liefen sie zur Madonna.
Maria starrte ins Leere
Und hielt die Hände weit ausgestreckt
Von ihrem gesegnetem Leibe.
Ihr Gesicht war hart.
Alle Milde leuchtete auf Tränen,
In ihren gekrummten Händen gesammelt.
Die hielt sie drum weit von sich gestreckt.

Und Gott hieß den Teufel gehen.

Durch Wüsten schritten die Frauen,
Lallten ihr Lied
Ein Kind ein Kind

Da hundert Jahre vergangen,
Tappten auf rosigen Füßen
Die ungeborenen Kinder
Zur Jungfrau Marie,
falteten fromm ihre Händchen

Marie lächelte

Und es hub im Himmel ein Schluchzen
Wie eine wehe Melodie,
Die ruhelos verstörte Töne sammelt
zu sanfter Harmonie.

Und Gott erlöste die Frauen

Über ihren Gräbern wuchs
Cypressenhain
Drin spielten junge Rehe.

Source: N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz.

Leichen im Priesterwald (1/2)

Ein Düngerhaufen faulender Menschenleiber.
Verglaste Augen, blutgeronnen.
Der ballt verkrampfte Faust, die Brust zerfraß Schrapnell.
Zerspaltete Hirne, ausgespiene Eingeweide.
Die Luft verpestet von Kadavergestank:

Ein einzig grauenvoller Wahnsinns-schrei!

O Frauen Deutschlands!
Frauen Frankreichs!
Säht ihr eure Männer!

Sie tasten mit zerfetzten Händen
(Gebärde, leichenstarr, ward zärtlich brüderlicher Hauch)
Nach den verquollenen Leibern ihrer Feinde.

Ja, sie umarmen sich!
O schauerlich Umarmen!

Ich sah es an und bleibe stumm!
Bin ich ein Tier, ein Metzgerhund?
Warum nicht stürz ich aus dem Graben,
Und recke klagend meine Hände?!
Kündete ich Liebe!
Kündete ich Fluch!
Oder stammle ..
Stammle:
Geschändete!
Gemordete!

Doch warum schweig ich?
Knirsche: Pflicht!
Und schweige.

Source: Verkündigung, ed. by Rudolf Kayser, Munich, 1921, p. 251.

Liebe

Ich bin das A und das O,
Der Anfang und das Ende.
Ich lege meine starken Hände
Auf dein blasses blütenbeschwertes Haar.
Mein Lachen,
An frühlingschwangeren Tagen
Klingt in Dir fort
Und Lieder ertönen
In deiner lichterfüllten
Sehnsuchtsgestillten
Brust.
Mein Leid zerreißt mit stillen Peitschenhieben
Den duftigen Schleier
Aus glitzernden Sonnenfäden und Tautränen,
Die zischend zerstieben
Und giftiger Atem
Verpestet
Die Lust.
Ich bin der Sturm
Ich Dein Verlangen
Ich reiße Dich zu Boden
Durch heiße Begierde.
Ich trage Dich empor
Auf schönheitstrunkenen Blicken
Ins Unendliche
Und Deine Seele
Wird eins
Mit mir.
Ich bin das A und das O
Der Anfang und das Ende

Source: N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz.

Lied der Einsamkeit (1/3)

Sie wölbt um meine Seele Kathedralen,
Sie schäumt um mich wie brandend Meer,
Der Gasse sperrt sie sich metallne Wehr,
Opalne Hülle schützt sie meine tiefsten Qualen.

In ihr fühl' ich die Süße abendlicher Stille,
Auf leeren Stunden blüht sie maienliches Feld.
Ihr Schoß gebärt das Wunder der geahnten Welt,
Aus ihr bricht stählern Schwert mein höchster Wille.

Sie schmiegt sich meinem Leib wie schlanker Frauen Hände.
In meine Sehnsucht perlt sie aller Märchen Pracht.
Ein sanftes Schwingen wird sie, hingetraumte Nacht.

Doch ihre Morgen lodern steile Brände.
Sie sprengen Tore schwerer Alltagszelle
Einstürzen Räume. Aufwächst eisge Helle.

Source: Die weißen Blätter, 6 (1919), p. 264.

Lied der englischen Arbeiter

Weh, weh, weh und weh, ob Elend, Sklaverei und Not,
hört vom Moor, aus dumpfen Ställen, Fiebergassen, Arbeitshöllen,
hört Alt-Englands Grablied gellen: Arbeit oder Tod.

Wann, wann, wann und wann zerzaust ein Sturm den Lügenstand?
Nicht Schmarotzer sollen rafften, Schieber, Parasiten, Laffen,
Freie Menschen sollen schaffen, frei auf freiem Land.

Auf, auf, auf und auf! Dem Feind ins Aug', ins Aug' gesehn!
Nacht vorbei, das Licht gewinnt, voll das Maß, der Sand gerinnet.
Richter sitzt, der Spruch beginnet - Wer wird bestehn?

Source: Verbrüderung, Berlin, 1930, p. 30.

Lumpenlied

Was fragt Ihr mich, woher ich kam
und wo meine Seele zerrissen.
Warum mein Körper bell [sic] fiebernd Blut
und meine Kleider zerschlissen.
Säuft Ihr Tölpel und singt das Lied
vom Narren, der zur Heimat zieht.
Drob lacht schon der Dreckspatz Tod
er rief herbei die Sippen
und klapperte mit seinen sieben
sieben Klapperrippen
Klipp Klapp.

Sei's drum wir trinken Bruderschaft
Ihr Knecht und Vassallen
Und haut man uns den Hintern voll
Wollen wir die Fäuste ballen.
Säuft Ihr Tölpel und singt das Lied
vom Narren, der zur Heimat zieht.
Drob lacht schon der Dreckspatz Tod
er rief herbei die Sippen
und klapperte mit seinen sieben
sieben Klapperrippen
Klipp Klapp.

Source: N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz.

M

Marschlied (1/2)

Wir Wand'rer zum Tode,
Der Erdnot geweiht,
Wir kranzlose Opfer,
Zu Letztem bereit.

Wir fern aller Freude
Und fremd aller Qual.
Wir Blütenverwehte
Im nächtlichen Tal.

Wir Preis einer Mutter,
Die nie sich erfüllt,
Wir wunschlose Kinder,
Von Schmerzen gestillt.

Wir Tränen der Frauen,
Wir lichtlose Nacht,
Wir Waisen der Erde
Ziehn stumm in die Schlacht.

Source: Die Aktion, 8 (1918), p. 172.

Der Meister

Wie er daherschreitet
Germanischer junger Priester
Im röckebesetzten Hörsaal
Zwei Ruhmbänder schmuckzieren
An seinem Brennesselrock.
Seine Augen küssen Blaustrümpfe hold
Wie er getagebucht aufstrebt.
Immer bringen seine Lippen
Centralfeuerige Glut.
Seine Worte schreiten nur über Grund
(Stolpern nie über Tiefe)
Wie er kunstverhalten ist.
Aus jedem Vortrag, den er hält
purpurt gläsernes Herz
nicht

Source: N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz.

Menschen (1/2)

1.

Als der Krieg sie überfiel wie ein toller Hund,
Schrien sie auf und riefen sich herbei,
Daß sie gemeinsam sich wehrten
Und ihren Willen
Wie einen Flammenfelsen
Dem Kampf entgegen stemmten. -
Oder taten's nur, um sich zu stützen
Und nicht allein zu sein,
So unsagbar allein.

2.

Da prasselten auf ihre Seelen riesengroße Steine.
Sie sahen sich auf uferlosem Meer
Ertrinkende die Arme kläglich recken.
Und fühlten Schmerz an ihrem Herzen zerren.
Den Schuldbeladnen wähten sie im Bruder,
Den Lässigen, den Schwächlichen -
Doch keiner rief: "Mein Bruder, wir sind alle schuldig!"
Nein, sie verhüllten psalmodierend ihre Köpfe
Und haßten sich.

3.

Der Krieg verjäherte zum Gespenst,
Das zeitlos knöchern seine Finger
Um die willig-unfreiwill'gen Völker krallte.
Die Menschen taten von sich ihre Hüllen
Und sahn sich scheu voll Mißtraun an.
Ihr Haß ward müd, verschlackt.
Mit leeren Augen saßen sie beisammen.
Doch keiner war, der Bruder lächeln mochte
Und keiner, der den andern weh in seine Arme schloß.
Gleichgültig blickten sie sich an und fremd.
Die Worte, die sie sprachen, waren Masken.
Sie wußten drum.
Sie hatten nicht die Kraft, in Einsamkeiten zu entfliehn
Und dort zu wappnen sich mit dem kristallinen Panzer.
So saßen sie beisammen
Mumien oder Grammophone.

Source: Kameraden der Menschheit, ed. by Ludwig Rubiner, Potsdam, 1919, pp. 62-63.

Mütter (1/3)

Aus weißen Lilien sei euch ein Tempel erbaut,
Von des Himmels Weiten sternhell überblaut.
Weihestätte euren Tränen,
Altar eurem tiefsten Leid.

Mütter,
Die euch Hoffnung, frohe Bürde,
Liegen jäh zerfetzt in aufgewühlter Erde,
Gleichnis graungepeitschter Menschenherde,
Röcheln zwischen Drahtverhauen,
Oder siechen scheu als Krüppel,
Irren blind durch gelbes Korn.
Tauben tasten starren Blicks nach euren Liedern,
Blumennetze, die ihr webtet
Um die Wiege eures Kindes.
Die auf Feldern jubelnd stürmten,
Torkeln eingekerkert, wahnsinnsschwärend,
Blinde Tiere durch die Welt.

Mütter!
Eure Söhne taten das einander.

Eure Schmerzen lodern allzu grell,
Um verlöschend sich im Aufschrei zu befreien.
Sind zu sehr erfüllt von Grauen, um Gebete stammelnd
Hingekniet Erlösung still zu finden.

Grabt euch tiefer in den Schmerz,
Laßt ihn zerren, ätzend wühlen ...

Reckt gramverkrampfte Arme,
Seid Vulkane, glutend Meer:
Schmerz, gebäre Tat!

Source: Kameraden der Menschheit, ed. by Ludwig Rubiner, Potsdam, 1919, pp. 64-65.

Mütter (2/3)

Aus weißen Lilien sei euch ein Tempel erbaut,
Von des Himmels Weiten sternhell überblaut.
Weihestätte euren Tränen,
Altar eurem tiefsten Leid.

Mütter,
Die euch Hoffnung, frohe Bürde,
Liegen jäh zerfetzt in aufgewühlter Erde,
Gleichnis graungepeitschter Menschenherde,
Röcheln zwischen Drahtverhauen,
Oder siechen scheu als Krüppel,
Irren blind durch gelbes Korn.
Tauben tasten starren Blicks nach euren Liedern,
Blumennetze, die ihr webtet
Um die Wiege eures Kindes.
Die auf Feldern jubelnd stürmten,
Torkeln eingekerkert, wahnsinnsschwärend,
Blinde Tiere durch die Welt.

Mütter!
Eure Söhne taten das einander.

Eure Schmerzen lodern allzu grell,
Um verlöschend sich im Aufschrei zu befreien.
Sind zu sehr erfüllt von Grauen, um Gebete stammelnd
Hingekniet Erlösung still zu finden.

Grabt euch tiefer in den Schmerz,
Laßt ihn zerren, ätzend wühlen ...
Recket gramverkrampfte Arme,
Seid Vulkane, glutend Meer:
Schmerz, gebäre Tat!

Euer Leid, Millionen Mütter,
Dien' als Saat durchpflügter Erde,
Lasse keimen, schattenspendend, Menschlichkeit!

Source: Nie wieder Krieg!, Berlin, 1924, p. 36.

N

Nacht im Priesterwald

Der Vollmond fließt azurne Ströme
Um Bäume, die zerfetzt zerschossen,
Wie Krüppel stumm in sich verkriechen,
Von Schreckmorästen zäh umgossen.

Er deckt die Blöße wunder Zweige,
Die Blut und Eiter klebrig rinnen,
Mit gleißend kühlen Zitterhänden,
Gewebt aus feinstem Silberlinnen.

In Stunden, da das Blutmeer brandet,
Zerreißt Gestöhn die Tränenfülle:
Entsetzensschrei vor Gott und Menschen
Ächzt wurzellos durch nächtge Stille.

Source: Fritz-Claus-Nachlaß, Marbach am Neckar.

Nächte (1/3)

Die nächte bergen stilles Weinen.
Es pocht wie schüchtern Kindertritt an deine Wand.
Du lauschst erschreckt: Will jemand deine Hand?
Und weißt: Du reichst sie nur den Steinen.

Die Nächte bergen Trotz und Fluchen,
Verwünschung, Stöhnen, grellen Zank.
Wen Freiheit zerrt, macht Dunkel krank.
In Augen blutet großes Suchen.

Die Nächte bergen niegesungne Lieder.
In Nachttau blühen sie samtne Schmetterlinge.
Sie küssen die verborgnen Dinge.
Du willst sie haschen und sie sind verweht.
Kein Weg ist, der zu ihnen geht.
Nie hörst du ihre Melodien wieder.

Source: 'Drei Sonette. Von Ernst Toller', Der Freihafen, 2 (1919/20), H. 10, p. 147.

R

Resignation

Da sich dein Leib erschloß wie junger Frühlingsmorgen,
Und Deine Seele sich entfaltete im duftopalenen Tau,
Da Du Maria warst und Traum der lieben Frau,
Und Venus hell in Sinneslust geborgen.

Da sich Dein Schoß mir öffnete, auf daß ich strömend ihn erfülle,
Floh ich Erschreckter Dich und lief in regnerischer Nacht.
Ich habe mich in tausendfachem Hohn verlacht,
Ich war Dir fern und fremd und nichts als Hülle.

Nun brach aus mir ein Quell von reifer Sommerglut.
Wie Strom in rauschend Meer möcht' er in Deine Fülle münden.
Doch ach ein herbstlich schwerer Schatten wuchs in Deinem Blut.

Oh daß ich glühe, während Deine Augen Müdes künden,
Denn Du gingst weiter, weintest wohl die nächtgen Stunden.
Und hast mit toten Dingen müd Dich abgefunden.

Source: N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz.

Der Ringende (1/3)

1.

Die Dichter weihen bunten Versenkranz
Verständnisvoller Liebe zarter Mütter,
Sie schütten süßen Tau und Blütenschnee
Auf Knospen, die im Juniatem beben ...
Ich lasse meine magren Finger
Behutsam über jene weiche Worte gleiten,
Und denke schmerzlich grauer Stunden,
Da mich Erkenntnis schüttelte mit dürrer Faust.
Geschenke wurden Hagelkörner, die mich schlugen.
O Mutter, Mutter,
Warum bist Du's nicht?

2.

Kann ich nicht jene Frau,
Die mir mit ihrem Blute
In dunklen Nächten Herzschlag lieb,
Aus frommem Herzen Mutter nennen,
So will ich weite Wege wandern,
O, daß ich einst von langem Suchen nicht ermüdet,
An stachelichen Ligusterhecken träumend,
Dich, Mutter, finde.

3.

Bin ich nicht selbst mir Mutter?
Du, Frau, gabst stöhnend
Einmal dumpfes Leben mir.
Ich starb so oft seit jenem Tag.
Ward neuer Keim, der wuchs und sich entfaltete,
Der Frucht entgegenreifte,
Gebar mich schweigend unter namenlosen Qualen.
Ich ward mir Mutter.

Source: Fritz-Claus-Nachlaß, Marbach am Neckar.

S

Sämann -- Soldat

Fremde Scholle durchpflügst Du mit starker Faust
Der braunen Erde zwingst Du Fruchtbarkeit.
Die Pferde ziehen Schritt für Schritt den Pflug,
die Pferde hängen
Und du denkst an Weib und Kind
an deinem deutschen Herd.
In deinem Blick ist Liebe, die streift über fremdes Land.
Der Bauer, wo mag der sein?
Hält ihn die Erde, die er Jahr um Jahr bebaut?
Kämpft er gegen dich -- mit Haß und Bitterkeit
Hüh, Schwarzer zieh!

Source: N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz.

Soldaten

Ich kann die Gesichter meiner Kameraden nicht vergessen.
Sie ließen sich in Fabriken führen und zu Maschinenteilen pressen.
Vierjähriger Krieg hat ihre Seelen erdrückt und ihre Augen geblendet,
Das Menschliche ihrer Gesichter bespien, da starb es, geschändet.
Bei Dirnen aus dunklen Hafenschenken und schmutzigen Bordellen
Sieht man oft unter geschminkten Masken ein gütiges Lächeln quellen.
Aber die Gesichter meiner Kameraden gleichen erstarrten Lachen -
Gott! Bruder! Mensch! werden sie jemals wieder erwachen?!

Source: Kameraden der Menschheit, ed. by Ludwig Rubiner, Potsdam, 1919, pp. 63-64.

Spaziergang der Sträflinge (1/3)

Sie schleppen ihre Zellen mit in stumpfen Augen
Und stolpern, lichtentwöhnte Pilger, im Quadrat.
Gezackte Fenster glotzen schrill und saugen
Wie Ungeziefer Blut zur winterlichen Saat.

Im Eck die Wärter träge lauern.
Von Sträuchern, halb verkümmert, rinnt ein trüber Dunst.
Der kriecht empor an grauen Mauern
Und gattet sie in ekler Brunst.

Vorm Tore hilflos starb der Stadt Gewimmel.
"Am Unrathafen wird im Frühling Grünes sprießen"
Denkt einer endet mühsam die gewohnte Runde.

Verweilt und blinzelt matt zum Himmel.
Er öffnet sich wie bläulich rote Wunde,
Die brennt und brennt und will sich nimmer schließen.

Source: Die weißen Blätter, 6 (1919), p. 262.

Ständchen

Weiß nicht Mädels, sinds die grauen
Augen voll Verheißung und den sinnlich kühlen
Locken aller rätselhaften Frauen?
Ist der Duft, der strömt aus deinen Hüllen,
der mein Sinnen mit den Düften
Märchenhafter Gärten kosend, küssend,
trunken will erfüllen?
Singt der Rhythmus deiner birkenschlanken Glieder,
meines Blutes toll berauschter Lieder?
Wünsche sind, die wie mystisch kultendunkle Schlangen
neu erweckte Lebensliebesglut verlangen.
-- Oder will ein Teufel Possen mit mir spielen,
soll ich melancholisch hyperchondrisch
Nach des Weibes Beinen schielen?

Source: N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz.

[Steht eine Wacht in Frankreich]

Steht eine Wacht in Frankreich.
Die eint nicht Haß, die eint nicht Gier,
Ein Volk in seiner Liebe
siehst du erwecket hier.
Will keinen Ruhm, will keinen Stein,
Arbeit und Pflicht, so Tag um Tag.
Kein brausender Fanfarenklang;
eines Volkes brausender Tiefengesang:
Denkt an beschworenen Händeschlag.
Nicht Kreuze, Lied und bunte Ehr.
Es will sein Recht, es will sein Recht
nicht mehr.

Source: N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz.

Studentinnen

Die Frauen gehen mit Wünschen schwanger.
In Nächten bricht aus ihrem Mund ekstatisch Schrei:
"Erlöset uns von dunklem Schmerzenspranger!
Gebt Kinder uns! Umarmt uns! Macht uns frei!

Voll Lust wollen wir das Kind gebären.
Das tiefste Blut belehrt, daß wir ein Weib.
Mit unserem Herzblut müssen wir ein Totes nähren -
Erfüllung wird durch fruchtbeladnen Leib."

Source: N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz.

Sylvester 1916

Eine Fratze grinst mich grünlich an.
Höhnt: Nur Mut ich bin das neue Jahr.
Packt das Leben, sei ein Mann.
Donnert: Fluch dem Gott, der mich gebär.

Source: N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz.

T

Den Toten (I. Tafel) (1/2)

Die trotzigen Leiber gestemmt
Wider den Bund der blinden Bedränger,
Löschte Euch Schicksal mit dunkler Gebärde.
Wer die Pfade bereitet, stirbt an der Schwelle,
Doch es neigt sich vor ihm in Ehrfurcht der Tod.

Source: Archiv der Akademie der Künste, Berlin.

U

Über meiner Zelle... (1/2)

Über meiner Zelle
Stapfen schwere
Nägelbeschlagne Schritte
Hin und her.
Die enge Zelle droben
Hin und her.
Immer
Ruhelos
Bruder, möchte ich rufen.
Aber wird er mich hören?
Das kleine Mädchen des Herrn Feldwebel
Versteckte ihr Köpfchen
Und bog sich ängstlich fort,
Als ich ihr die Hand reichen wollte.

Source: Unser Weg 1920. Jahrbuch Verlag Paul Cassirer, Berlin, 1919, p. 75.

Umarmung

Du kamst zu mir in farbigen Gewändern
Dein Auge strahlte auf als Gotendom.
Dein Atem wob Gewölb aus Strahlenbändern
Dein Schreiten glich verhaltneem Strom.

Und deine Mühen glitten Dir zu Füßen
Da standst Du vor mir, Schwester, lichtgerecht
Ich senkte stumm die Stirn um Dich zu grüssen,
Wie Sommerhauch, der Rosenknospen weckt.

Zwei fromme Menschen, die sich liebend ehren
So strömten unsre Leiber in geahnten Quell
Wir fühlten Lebensfülle fruchtgeschwellt sich mehren.

Lichtbündel tanzten um uns rot und grell.
Und als wir lächelten in Abschiedsneigen
Hing stolzer Orgelklang in Blütenzweigen.

Source: Fritz-Claus-Nachlaß, Marbach am Neckar.

W

[Wenn ich weiße schmale Hände sehe]

Wenn ich weiße schmale Hände sehe,
schlanke feine Finger,
deren Nägel rosig glänzen
denke ich an meiner Mutter Hände.
Hände,
die tausend Fältchen
eingekrallter Leiden,
sorgenfüllter Mühen
hart durchfurchen.

Wenn ich weiße schmale Hände sehe,
schlanke feine Finger,
deren Nägel rosig glänzen
denke ich an meiner Mutter Hände.

Source: N.S.D.A.P.-Hauptarchiv Koblenz.

Widmung (1/3)

Dämmerung, gütige Schwester der Gefangenen, wie ist
Deine Stille erfüllt von schwingender Melodie
Auf der schmalen Pritsche liege ich und lausche
Ich höre Euer Herz klopfen, Brüder
Dort ... und dort ... und dort ...
Eingekerkert in den Gefängnissen aller Kontinente
In Atlanta und Nîmes, in Keckemet und Barcelona, in Kalkutta und Mailand
Brüder mir: Kämpfer Rebellen Revolutionäre - ich grüße Euch.
Eine Welt wollen sie Euch weigern. Eure Welt aber lebt in Eurem Willen.
Und Euch grüße ich, Brüder in den Kerkern Afrikas, Asiens, Australiens: schwarze,
gelbe, braune Schützer ehrwürdiger Landschaften, unterdrückt und geschändet
von Europas Zivilisation.
Euch Brüder, in Zuchthäusern und Hafthäusern der Erde
Die Ihr
In der Heimat Not wuchset
Im Hause Unrecht frontet
Im Bett Vergessen schliefet
Die Ihr zu Dieben und Einbrechern, zu Totschlägern und Mördern wurdet - Brüder
jetzt eines Schicksals, ich grüße Euch.
Und dieses denke ich:
Wer kann von sich sagen, er sei nicht gefangen, ob gleich kein Gitterloch ihm den
Himmel raubt, und keine Mauer ihm die Erde stiehlt?
Ich höre Euer Herz klopfen
Dort ... und dort ... und dort ...
O wäre mir gegeben zu lauschen mit der großen zeitlosen Liebe des geträumten Gottes
Ich hörte
Den einen Herzschlag
Aller menschlichen Geschlechter

Source: Kunst und Volk, Vienna, 1923, p. 66.

Wunder

Meine ruhelosen Hände
Die durch Raum und Zeiten zuckend weichen
Werden fromme stille Pilger,
Wenn sie Deine blasse Stirne streichen.

Source: Fritz-Claus-Nachlaß, Marbach am Neckar.